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SUDDEN

BY OLIVER STRANGE

DIMENSION OF ILLION

BY

IRVING HEINE

CHAPTER I

ONE minute I was flying a plane, and there aren't many guys in the United States who can do that better than I, at least not *much* better. She was my own crate, too—I'd practically stood over them when they put her together—and I figured I knew the little lady's every whim, but as I was saying, one minute I was flying her, the next minute I wasn't; she was doing just as she pleased.

The strange thing was that when I came out of the one-minute "blank" *I was over seven thousand miles from the spot where I'd been when the blank hit me.* Southern Texas had been unwinding below me when I felt the gentle flicker over my face, as though something as delicate as cobweb had caressed me. I lost consciousness for one minute. I knew it was a minute and no more because I'd just glanced at the clock on the panel. What's more the petrol guage told me I'd scarcely moved. Then, for heaven's sake, why was that the Yellow Sea in front of me instead of the Gulf of Mexico?

I felt myself turn cold for a moment. I'm not a guy who scares easily; you don't often need to when you stand just over six feet

high and weigh around two hundred. But—this was different, and I wasn't mistaken about the spot I was in. I wasn't flying very high and I sure knew the tip of the Korean Peninsula. I'd flown in there many a score of times during the rumpus, but I didn't like that Yellow Sea; especially the idea of anything happening that might cause me to dive down into the middle of it. I had a screwy feeling, as I banked and set the plane's sights for the jolly old Philippines, that somebody, or something, was drawing a bead on me while I did it, and—I wasn't thinking of any landlocked goons who might be watching from below. The idea I got was that I was being observed from all around me, from the air and from the very sunlight itself. I got the decision over another cold shiver, straightened the crate out, and gave her the gun.

I had friends in Manilla, having favoured Uncle Sam to the extent of serving a period in his Fighting Marines there, and I welcomed the chance of renewing their acquaintance as well as some of the high-spots in and around the place. I told nobody about my queer experience up in the blue, however. A thing like that isn't too good for one's reputation—or for one's flying licence, for that matter. On my way back over the Pacific I decided to make stops at Marshall Island and Hawaii. I had all the time in the world, being a man of absolute leisure when I wasn't poking my nose into a certain well-organized business which could easily do without me, and which owed me exactly nothing—except the fat dividends it shied into my bank at stated intervals.

There was a family I knew in Hawaii, and to them I told my story, not only because we happened to be speaking of unusual experiences at the time, but because I knew that they were all three specially interested in such things. They passed a few comments on my story, although I could see that they believed me, but they advised me to speak with a certain native. I agreed, and I'll admit that I expected to find a guy with all the trappings of an old witch-doctor. What I found was an elderly guy with a quiet voice and engaging manners, who lived in a modern villa surrounded by an adoring family, trees, and books, some of these inside and some outside, of course. To my surprise, this man also believed my story, hard though it was when you included a perfectly sound and otherwise well-behaved airplane soaking up seven thousand miles during my one-minute mental blackout, and using no extra gas to do it.

We tasted an excellent wine he had his family haul up from the

cellar, and we smoked a cigar apiece. Then he smiled gently on me, shook hands, and advised me never to try that particular route at that particular time, and at that altitude, and so on, again. He anticipated my obvious question by saying:

"Please do not ask me, because I cannot——" He smiled again, and shrugged. Then: "Shall we say—because I am not quite certain?"

His parting advice was:

"You are young, my friend, and have years of life before you. There are many sides to life; for you—the happy side. But—please do not try any experiments with a view to investigating your experience. Enjoy yourself, Mister Bruhn. My good wishes go with you."

He smiled, and held out his hand. I thanked him for his advice and good wishes, but—I didn't get it. In any case why should I want that same experience repeated?

I took off from Hawaii the next day and revelled in the blue Pacific below me, and the blue sky, and the sunshine; and I tried my best not to keep checking both the time and the petrol-guage. I figured I was two hours out when the one-minute "blank" came again, but strangely enough, when I came out of it I wasn't either surprised or alarmed. Maybe, I thought, I'm getting used to this. Maybe!

I glanced at the clock and the guage. It was the same, but this time I didn't know where I was. This time the Pacific hadn't been shifted and another ocean put in its place. This time I was flying over dry land, and boy, how dry it looked. I've seen the Mohave Desert in California but I haven't seen the Sahara; I guess the half-barren slice of territory then below me was somewhere between the two, in amenities, I mean. It was about equally divided between stretches of dark blue rock, sand, and a kind of dried-up foliage that I didn't remember ever having seen before.

I sighed, and started to bank the kite; that is I *tried* to start banking. All the gadgets for doing just that were in working order as far as the parts nearest me were concerned; the only thing was that the plane didn't respond, and I was losing height rapidly. I went on working at the controls without it having the least effect upon the bus, then I reached for the "umbrella." At the same time a voice sang into my ears.

"But—it is too *late*," the voice said.

I stopped, my hand half-way to the para., and I knew then that I had really had been hearing voices ever since I had snapped out of that blank. They were nice voices, too, but I hadn't an idea exactly where they came from. They seemed to come from all around me, from the very air and the sky itself. I gave it up. Sure it was too late; no use to try and jump from that height. So—this was *it*, at last. "*Franklin Bruhn, millionaire playboy and sometime sportsman, ex-soldier director of this-and-that, who died when his plane crashed in . . .* " I could read the print, all except where it was about to happen.

"But it's all *right*, Franklin Bruhn," another voice sang into my ears. "So long as you relax, *and do not worry about anything*."

O.K., I thought; I won't worry—about anything. And everything was going to be all right. I looked at the great jagged boulders tearing up at me as the plane went straight towards them. Nothing could stop me from hitting them, but—suddenly they weren't there any more. It was like the switch over on a film, or television, when they cut you from one scene to another. There was no sound, no sense of any change actually taking place, but I was in a beautiful garden instead of sitting in a plane that was hell-bent on crashing. The plane had gone, and there I stood—alone. It was a huge garden, too; about half the size of a race track, with red paths and green lawns, entrancing little bushes and alarmingly high trees, and with flowers and fountains everywhere. The air was warm and soothing, the lawn soft and springy to walk upon. I figured it could have been Honolulu, California, West Spring Park, or maybe a slice of the Garden of Eden come to light at last.

I took a good look round then pinched myself to make sure I was awake. It seemed that I was, but not when I heard the laugh right behind me and spun round only to find nobody there. To my way of thinking that settled it; I was either dead or nuts. I said as much in as many words, but again I heard the laugh, and I'll allow that it was pleasant on the ear.

"You are neither dead nor nuts, as you put it," the lovely voice said. "You have merely arrived."

I said:

"But listen, lady, you may be right when you tell me I have arrived. Looking round this place I'd say that was reasonable. But—speaking to someone I can't even see . . . "

"Of course you can't see me, Franklin Bruhn, although you are looking straight at me."

"Well, you should know."

"And the reason you cannot see me is because you are still antagonistic to the idea of coming here. In other words you have not yet come to accept your arrival—here."

I must have looked puzzled because she again let out that golden stream of laughter. I told her it was O.K. for her to laugh her head off at me—if she had such a thing as a head—but would she for heaven's sake tell me where "here" might be.

"That," the sweet voice told me, "you will never learn from one of us. Not until you are one of us, and are ready to go back."

"Go back," I cried. "Then—then there is a return passage on this trip?"

"Oh yes, but only under certain conditions, which you will learn soon. First you have to see the place in which you have arrived."

I was glancing round the garden again, but she said:

"Oh this is merely our reception. We bring all newcomers here. It gives them at least a chance to grasp the fact that—well, that they have arrived."

"You mean that *you* did all that stuff to my plane. You made it shift over seven thousand miles in one minute when I was travelling over——"

"Of course, Franklin Bruhn. It was easy, but—you escaped us that first time when we got you only as far as the Saishu Straight, near Korea. You were stronger than we had guessed."

"H'mm! But—look here, lady, when talking to——"

"I know, Franklin Bruhn, I know. You like to see the person you are talking to. You will, and we will sit on yonder seat in the shade, and we will talk. But first let me prove to you that I really am here. I am about to touch you. Please keep quite still."

I felt my hands clasped in hands that were small, and soft, and warm. Almost at once the hands passed along my arms, touched my neck and my face, and at the same time I was aware of a beautiful perfume. Then the hands slid down to my waist and I

felt them take a grip on the clothes at my belt-line. An instant later I was raised bodily from the ground and carried easily in the direction of the seat which the voice had mentioned.

CHAPTER II

TO say that I was astonished doesn't say a thing. Like I said, I weigh around two hundred pounds, and any dame who could walk aronnd carrying me like a piece of . . . .

She must have seen what was passing through my mind from the look on my face. She laughed, quietly this time, and said:

"You think that is unusual, Franklin Bruhn?"

"Unusual," I almost yelled. "Why a dame who could even lift me . . . "

"But I didn't. Not really. I merely made you *believe* that I was lifting you. Actually I felt nothing at all of your weight. You see, here it is practically always the power of the mind that counts. But not always. Won't you, Franklin Bruhn, please accept the situation so that I may appear to you if only for a moment or two?"

"Why sure," I said, grinning. "Sure I will, if it helps. But why only for a moment? Why all this—invisibility?"

"We adopted it as a protection in the first place, and it isn't so much a matter of making ourselves invisible as casting away the things we no longer needed, like arms, legs—in fact our complete bodies as you know them."

"Good Lord! Then what are—I mean how——?"

Again that golden laugh.

"We are merely 'minds', Franklin Bruhn; just a race of 'minds'. After all, you must admit that your mind is the key to everything your body does, and that mind has to work so hard at so many things, such as earning a living, absorbing education, and—and—"

"Figuring out tax returns. Don't please."

"Well, you should be able to see that, freed from all the outer

and inner chores, as I believe you call them, the mind can apply itself to higher things such as solving racial differences—there is no question of 'color', by the way, between 'minds'—creating a state where everyone can be happy, and where there is no war or—or——"

"Or hydrogen bombs?"

"Yes."

"But," I said, "what becomes of your bodies, and so on when—?"

"Not mine, Frankling Bruhn. I never had one. The body was finally discarded about one million years ago, counting in your time. That was soon after our dimension was decided upon."

"Dimension?"

I was at last beginning to get a glimpse of something about which I had read, or heard, also about a million years ago, it seemed to me then.

"Yes. The dimension through which you passed on this occasion, at our instigation, when you were flying over the sea. We generally choose a spot like that so that the sudden disappearance will not be remarked upon by anyone who should chance to see it."

I sighed, and said:

"So—you had to pick on me!"

"In your own language, Franklin Bruhn—I guess so."

"Why—if I might ask?"

"Because you look the type we need."

"So you *have* got a chore for me?"

"I don't think you will regard it as a chore. But now it is really time we were on our way."

"Oh yes? But listen, you said——"

"Of course, but it is not easy. Later, when you enter into another stage of our dimension, you will be able to see everything as it is, or at least as you think it is."

"O.K., then——"

"First you must realise that I will only be visible to you for a little while, and then only through *your* mind. Think then, please, how you wish me to appear to you. Think hard; concentrate."

I did. But all I had to go on was the dame's voice, and I'll allow that it was more than delightful. To me it was the loveliest sound I had ever heard. It just had everything in the way of warmth, sweetness and purity. I thought hard and I had my reward. So gradually that its appearance was almost imperceptible, the outline of a female figure appeared on the seat about two feet from the point where I was sitting. At first it resembled an outline, similar to a sketch by an artist. Even when it started to fill in the whole thing gave the impression of being a picture superimposed upon the scene rather than being part of it. The figure was still hazy when the voice, this time in a whisper, said:

"Keep thinking, Franklin Bruhn. Keep thinking hard."

And suddenly she was there! I stopped everything; stopped thinking, even stopped breathing, while for those few precious moments of time I basqued in the pure light of her almost ethereal loveliness.

She appeared to be about the medium size for a girl, or maybe a shade smaller, and she was a brunette with hair like the raven's wing. It started from a point in the front and was slicked back from her face and ears to disclose the flawless beauty of both. Her lustrous eyes seemed to be smiling at me, then her mouth smiled, too, and sunshine flashed from the white perfection of her teeth. She was dressed, I should say, in something that could have been a white tailored shirt and dark slacks, but whatever it was it gave me the idea that her figure was enough to make even Venus bite her lip. One slender hand rested on the seat, and I stretched out my own hand to touch it. I touched only the hard wood of the seat, and when I looked at the girl again she was already fading out. I could see the wooden seat appearing through her image, but it was her face that remained with me. It was, in the words of a song I once heard, "such a face as drifts through dreams."

I could not speak; I just sat there staring at the seat. Then I heard her voice again, and this time it had a warmer, more intimate note. It said:

"You see, Franklin Bruhn, it was different, wasn't it? When you could not see me I could touch you, but when *you* produced my image . . . What was I like, by the way?"

At last I found my voice.

"Why—don't you know?"

She laughed again, and said:

"Of course not. *You* produced the image. Was I beautiful—or not?"

I told her, and suddenly I felt her hand in mine. Again it was warm, and friendly. She said:

"Come, Franklin Bruhn. There is much for you to see and do."

I allowed her to pull me to my feet, and we walked along the garden, as I thought! But I suddenly realized that the garden had vanished, and that now I was walking along a rough track that wound through the red and bluerocks I had seen from the plane. Everything else was there, too, including the half-starved scrub, and the sand drifting here and there, and the look of bleakness and desolation. After that lovely garden . . .

The girl's hand was no longer in mine, and I felt rather miserable about that, even though she had said she was only a 'mind'.

I traipsed along that all-fired track, beginning to dislike it more with each step I took. And presently I saw something approaching from the direction in which I was pointed. It was was only a spec at first, and travelling some five hundred feet above the track. It got rapidly nearer, and then—I knew what it was. Of all the men in the States I was the one who really *had* seen them. It was a "flying saucer."

It ate up the last half-mile then dropped swiftly to one hundred feet and stopped dead, hovering above the track about twenty paces before the spot where I was standing. It was shaped like two saucers placed face-to-face but with a straight hull in between, and this hull was full of ports with just one escape door facing my way. It would be all of fifty feet in diameter and about thirty feet deep in the centre. The huge upper and lower saucers were revolving at a terrific rate, and in opposite directions as near as I could tell at that time. The machine had no visible means of propulsion and the only sound it made was a high-pitched singing note made by the spinning saucer-like discs. Presently it started to descend still further, until its lower disc was barely six feet from the ground. I could see that it was made of metal that looked something like duralumin. The door in its hull suddenly opened and a duralumin ladder complete with handrails shot down at a convenient angle. At the same time a little guy, no bigger than a schoolboy, dressed in a green one-piece plastic suit, came to the top of the ladder, bowed very low, and then

beckoned to me. He had a tiny head shaped like a cannon-ball, no ears, no hair, no nose, and a mouth that was merely a slit, four inches long, and occurring immediately above the place where his chin would have been if he'd had one. He had two eyes that bulged like those of a frog, and his skin, if it *was* skin, was the colour and texture of the outer hide of a grape-fruit.

Fed up with the rough track, and the scenery, and mostly everything except the invisible girl, I grabbed the handrails and hauled myself up the ladder. The little guy at the top stepped back a pace, bowed again politely, and waved to me to enter. I took him up on the invitation, and entered. It was terrific.

A touch of a button and the ladder was hauled inside and the door closed. I found myself in a corridor which apparently encircled the ship. Its floor was soft, coloured rubber, like the lining of the walls. The little man ushered me into a tiny saloon that was set in the centre portion of the ship, but before going in I took a slant through the nearest port. We were already at five hundred feet, and still climbing.

Inside the saloon, which was lit by a pleasant amber light whose source was a mystery to me, the sound of machinery was still nonexistent save for the hissing note, much fainter inside the ship than outside. The circular table in the saloon was laid for one, and believe me it was laid on with all the glass, silver, and napery you would find in a first-class hotel. A door slid open in the wall, and another bullet-headed, fruity-looking individual ran in with steaming dishes under silver covers. He laid everything on the table in a line going away from my place, afterwards pointing at each cover in turn, then vanished through the door to return almost immediately with wine, glasses, and cigarettes. I hadn't realized until that moment how hungry I was, so I opened up the covers of the first three dishes, took one look at what they contained, then fell to with a will.

I went right to town on that spread, cooked as it was in almost American style, then I lit a cigarette and knocked off a glass of wine. That, too, was good. I was slowly getting around to wondering how a race of "minds", without any bodies, managed to eat, when the corridor opened and the first little guy in the green suit beckoned to me, pointed at the nearest port opposite the saloon door, and signalled for me to look down. It was an astonishing scene that met my eyes. I stared hard for quite a time, but—I didn't get it all at once. As far as I could make out, I was looking at an entrancing little fairylike city that was actually floating

through a sea of mist. It was immediately below us at around five hundred feet, and there seemed to be absolutely nothing either around the city or beneath it.

CHAPTER III

THE sun was shining on that tiny city, and I noticed that our ship was slowly floating down to it. Then the mist cleared below, as though by a strong breeze, and I realized that the mist had merely given the impression that the city was floating. Actually it was built on the peak of a mountain that must have been at least a mile high, the walls of the city starting upwards where the mountain left off. Presently I was able to see thecountry-side below, but at that distance I was unable to make much out of it.

The city was now coming up at us quite quickly, and naturally spreading out, although even at that I guessed it to be little larger than the average village in the States. Its streets, however, were quaint and narrow, and seemed to be all hills and slopes, just like the streets Walt Disney has in his fairy cartoons. There were even little alleys that had cobblestones. I got the idea that it would be quite a thing to try to tear around those streets in a high-powered Nash saloon.

A fairly large open square was now coming into view, and it followed that the "saucer" was making for it. It was bordered by trees and grass walks, and entirely surrounded by ultra-modern hotels and offices, with just one building that looked like something between a medium-sized palace and a foreign embassy. I forgot to mention, by the way, that the city was reasonably filled with little guys similar to the ones I had seen on board the saucer, and they all had plastic suits like the two I had seen, except that they were in all the colours of the rainbow.

We settled easily in the middle of the square, several little men walked across to the machine, and the door was thrown open and the ladder lowered. It suddenly occurred to me that I hadn't heard my little friends—as I took them to be—speak a single word during the whole time I had been in the ship. I found myself

anxious to hear the voice of the little guy who had sped down the ladder to meet the little guys from the city. It didn't work, although I was close behind him when he met up with the reception party. It didn't work because they did not speak at all. They merely bowed to each other in turn, then stood there rubbering into each other's faces, and from time to time their faces took on expressions such as surprise, pleasure, concern. At first I thought that maybe I'd gone deaf and couldn't hear . . . Then I saw that the little guys' lips weren't moving, and I *had* to get the idea. They were communicating with each other by means of thought-transference.

So I didn't get to hear the little guy—or his pals—speaking after all, but presently they all turned to me, bowed, and made a sign for me to follow them as they turned and marched towards the building that looked like a palace. When we entered I saw that it *was* a palace. At any rate it had all the silver, and gold, and plush I'd seen on pictures of palaces. And the place was full of the fruity little guys only this time they had uniform plastic suits that had a golden colour. They bowed and scraped and opened and closed doors for our party, and it was all very interesting, especially when we came to the chamber of chambers.

We entered through double doors that could have been solid gold. A red carpet led clear across the sumptuously-appointed room to a dais on which there was a gilt table and a high-backed chair. The dais was deserted, as was the rest of the room except for myself and escort. But the escort suddenly bowed very low, and for some reason I, too, became conscious of a presence in the room. All the same I couldn't see any reason for the little guys to make that obeisance. Then I heard the voice. It was a man's voice, but it had a nice quality. It bade the little guys scram, though not in those words. The little guys went out and I wondered what was next. I wasn't left wondering for long. Gazing at the gilt table I became aware of a change. It seemed that the space around the table and chair became filled with a warmer light, something between rose and amber, and it was into that coloured space that the image appeared.

This time it wasn't a young and beautiful girl; it was an intellectual-looking guy around thirty years of age. From his finely chiselled features, and keen, knowledgeable eyes, I would have placed him as principal of a college or co-ed school. He smiled at me, and said:

"Mister Bruhn, I have to welcome you to our dimension, thank

you for your co-operation so far, and apologize for having brought you here without asking your leave. Believe me, the latter was not so much a liberty as a necessity."

I nodded my acknowledgement, and he went on:

"First, allow me to offer you refreshment of the kind which usually accompanies such conferences as ours when they take place in your own dimension."

He made an almost imperceptible sign, and one of the little guys appeared at my elbow with a silver tray upon which there stood a decanter of wine and one glass. The servitor placed the tray on the desk and poured out a glassful.

"I did not ask your choice, Mister Bruhn," the intellectual guy said, "because I wished you to sample our finest effort in the way of wine production—for the masses, of course."

I looked at him, at the same time accepting the drink. I raised my eyebrows, but he shook his head.

"Not for me, Mister Bruhn," he said. "Remember I am but a 'mind'. I merely produced an image because I felt it would be more comfortable for you to talk to someone you could see. In discarding the body, of course, one discards its material requirements."

He smiled again, and I gave that idea some thought before deciding to smile myself. I figured that his way of life must have its attractions and compensations, but—for me . . . I tasted the wine, found it excellent, and told him my opinion. I set the glass down.

"And now, mister—er——"

"Illion I," he told me. "I am the mind supreme of our dimension You would like me to explain our object in bringing you here? Or would you care to obtain the information by asking questions?"

"Well," said I, "I should like to ask this: if you are, as I've been told, a 'race of minds', how come those little guys who walk the streets, fly the 'saucers', haul the wine around——"

"Oh those," he laughed. "Those, Mister Bruhn, are merely the workers. They have no minds at all, and we do not count them as being part of our cult. Menial tasks have to be performed, however, and they were evolved merely for that purpose."

"You count flying an air-machine a menial task?"

Again the tolerant smile, although the smiler had the knack of doing it without giving the least offence.

"Please do not take umbrage, Mister Bruhn. To the people of Earth the manipulation of such machines is, undoubtedly, a highly-skilled job; but to us it is merely what you would call a chore."

Which made me specially interested in what he might be pleased to call highly-skilled work. I told him so, and he answered by asking:

"Would you not consider it a highly-skilled operation, Mister Bruhn, to reduce what were once human beings to the point at which their earthly functions became superfluous, leaving the mind to roam at will through a million years of time?"

Thinking that over I guessed it *would* be like he thought. I told him that, too, in the form of an admission, then asked the meaning of it all.

"That, Mister Bruhn, would take a great deal of time. To you, it would be almost as tedious as un-learning the whole of your historical knowledge, as its origin goes back to the divergence of opinion amongst the original powers of Creation. Let it be sufficient for me to explain the reason why we brought *you* to this dimension."

I nodded, took another pull at the wine, and settled down. Illion the First went on:

"The reason why we chose you was, first, because you are an American; in other words a citizen of what is, at the moment, the largest, wealthiest, and most influential country on Earth. I intend you to assume, of course, that when I refer to influence I mean influence for *good.* Had we thought that description would apply to any of the Asiatic races we would have chosen a member of their race instead of yours. Secondly, we chose you because you are of slightly-more-than average type, yet typical enough to have personal influence with your own people. There is also another reason, Mister Bruhn, and that is connected with the fact that you are not only one of the people who told the world they had seen 'flying saucers'; you are one of those who *believed in them.*

"You were right, as you have seen, and I need scarcely add that those machines were sent by us."

I stared at him, and said:

"Do you mean that—that those saucers I saw here . . . "

"They are the same that were sent to Earth. We sent quite a number, chiefly for the purpose of observation. We wished to get an idea of our next form of approach. You see, Mister Bruhn, we have the idea of helping the people of the Earth to solve their difficulties. To us it is obvious that the whole of your international system has gone wrong. We see nations trying to ruin each other by various obnoxious methods of production and trading; eventually making war upon each other like packs of misguided wolves, as though war proves anything except who possesses the most gold. We see nations with decent ideals being undermined and frustrated by others because they cannot see that the promise of a heavenly crown is no answer to the cries of an empty stomach. We see clever men, whose efforts could easily be used in a far better cause, burning the midnight oil in the effort of discovering and releasing forces that will eventually send their world back into the darkness from which it sprang. In other words, Mister Bruhn, your world is heading for self-destruction, and we wish to help you prevent that. What is more we can help you, providing we can make your world believe in the cure."

It was quite a speech, and I had to agree that Illion I was absolutely correct. He asked me my opinion; I told him I was with him all the way. At the same time I couldn't believe that *anyone* had a magic cure for the world's ills. I told him that, too. His answer was:

"There is no *magic* cure, Mister Bruhn, but—there *is* a cure: world domination by a responsible power."

I was about to say that was where I came in, but he went on:

"I know that this has been thought of before, but always by unscrupulous nations whose methods of achieving it was to bludgeon the rest of the world into abject submission. That method is wrong—when applied by an unscrupulous power to the decent peoples of the world; but it would not be wrong if the decent people banded together and subdued, for all time, such nations as were given to the enslavement of other nations."

"And do you think they could?" I asked, well knowing the answer.

Illion I shook his head.

"They would take a thousand years and never accomplish it," he said. "If only because their weapons are old-fashioned and

not by any means powerful enough."

"Not even the jolly old H-bomb?"

He said:

"If used by both sides—as it would be—it would cancel everything out, and there might well be no world to live in when it was over. No, Mister Bruhn, world conquest can be achieved in a much gentler way—by a form of propaganda which we wish you to learn. It won't be learned in a moment, and we propose to take you through a course the object of which will be to equip you as the leader of the team of propagandists we intend to send to Earth. That is the first chance we intend to give the people of Earth, but—make no mistake—we intend to save Earth from itself whether they accept our propaganda or not."

"And if they do not?" I asked.

I thought his face hardened slightly as he said:

"Remember, my friend, it will be for their own good. But—if they do not accept the peaceful way to world domination by their own high-minded powers, then we, of this dimension, will reduce the Earth to submission by force of a weapon which will *literally* reduce their finest weapons, including the H-bomb, to the status of children's toys. We have perfected in this dimension, Mister Bruhn, a weapon which by the touch of a switch can prevent the detonation of any device within its range. And—if we are forced to bring your Earth to its knees in that way, we will see to it that every single inch of it is covered and within the range of our weapons—a fairly simple matter as only twelve weapons will be required to do the job."

CHAPTER IV

I SAT regarding him for a time. I still figured it was where I came in, because after all it had been tried so many times—without success. Almost as though he were reading my mind he said:

"You are thinking it cannot be done because it has been tried before but always by force of the cannon." He shook is head. "The cannon is not the answer, Mister Bruhn. For one thing it causes too much suffering and does but little as regards decimating the enemy. If it became necessary to decimate our enemies we

should use a much more effective method."

"You would?"

"Of course, Mister Bruhn. We are not only quite capable of preventing the detonations of all your 'fireworks'; we could, if we wished—or if we considered it necessary in the course of our campaign—obliterate any section of the Earth's population without leaving a trace. And it would not matter how large that population happened to be."

I said:

"There's a certain country, now——"

"No, no, Mister Bruhn. We are not thinking in terms of countries, it is the Earth we wish to save—from itself. And now I must leave you. You will have the opportunity of learning something of our work, and your studies will be directed by my second-in-command."

"One moment before you go," I said. "I was welcomed to your—er—dimension by a young lady who——"

"Of course, Mister Bruhn. That young lady is my second-in-command. Her name is 'Dianne'. She will contact you before long, and she will explain much that is puzzling you at this moment."

He faded out before my eyes, handing me a smile, and wishing me farewell for the time being as he did so. I felt a touch on my arm, and found one of the little uniformed cabbages, or whatever they were, standing by my chair. He bowed very low, made a sign, then marched easily from the room that had contained the 'presence'. When we reached the portals the little guy stopped, waved towards the great outdoors, then bowed again and marched back into the building, from which I took it I was free to blow.

I liked the idea of seeing the sunshine again, but I would have liked it even more if Dianne had been on hand to see it with me. I decided to give the city the once over.

It puzzled me, that city. I should have thought that anything produced by a people who were all brain would have been a cut above the old-time rambling little conglomeration in which I soon lost myself. And then it occurred to me that they had dreamed the place up purely for the use of the mundane gang they used for workers, a bunch of guys, to judge by what I had seen of them, who wouldn't have any use for gadgets such as automobiles, subways, movies, night-spots, electric razors, and so on. For them

the jolly old grindstone with their vegetable noses pressed to it for the sheer love of labour.

I saw what looked like a pub. I went inside and found that it *was* a pub. I called for beer and the fruity little man behind the counter laid on a foaming tankard. I felt in my pockets and produced a dollar bill, hoping that he'd accept it even if he didn't know its value in his own coinage. The guy rubbered at the note, turning it over and over, then handed it back to me with a laugh, and a signal for me to dip my face in the beer. It wasn't bad beer, either, but I guessed you would need an awful lot of it to make you see the elephant.

I made my way to the edge of the city. There was a sort of promenade that seemed to pass right around the city within the walls, and the wall was little more than knee-height to me. I took a good grip of the metal rail that had been fixed along the top, and leaned over to get an eyeful of that awful drop to the countryside below. It was all of the six thousand feet I'd judged it to be.

A voice at my side said:

"Careful you don't grow dizzy, Franklin Bruhn."

I turned, and I'll admit to a certain quickening of my pulses at what I saw. Dianne was there with all her ethereal loveliness, and she *did* have on dark slacks and a white shirt-waist. The latter was open at the throat, and that throat of hers was something to set any artist reaching for pencil and sketching block. I drank her in for a few moments while she smiled that brilliant flash of red and white.

"But you still can't touch me," she said at last. "I am still just am image."

I sighed, and shook my head.

"That image does me a power of good, Dianne," I said. "For the moment, that is. Meanwhile I guess I can go on hoping."

"For what, Franklin Bruhn?"

"Well, hoping that sometime you'll maybe put that image on a more solid basis, so that——"

"Franklin Bruhn, do not forget that you are here for a purpose and that purpose——"

"O.K., O.K., honey. I'm on a cramming course, and I'm only hoping you are going to be the professor. You see——"

"I am not. Well—not all the time. I am to direct your studies

generally, but there are others who will initiate you in the art of passing through the dimensions easily and at will."

"And all this is necessary, Dianne?"

"Of course!"

"To save the world?"

"Yes, Franklin Bruhn. It is—by the way, you do want to save the world, don't you?"

I looked at her for a moment, then laughed, and said:

"Frankly, Dianne, I do not. The world, as I see it——"

"Franklin Bruhn, you must not speak like that." I saw that she was almost on the verge of tears. "You should realise that it amounts to sacrilege even to think differently from Illion the First. He is—he is——"

"Guess he's the little-big-high-low-jack around here, eh? O.K., Dianne, but after all you are his right-hand man as you might say. Surely you have a lot of power."

"Of course. But I am supposed to report the slightest sign of any departure from what is practically Illion's religion—the saving of your world from the darkness that threatens it."

"Spoken like a true crusader, Dianne. Now——"

I went through the motion of placing my hand beneath her elbow in the customary American manner, then realized that the elbow, beautifully-shaped though it was, wasn't really there. All the same . . .

"Let us walk somewhere, Franklin Bruhn," she smiled, and I got the idea that she even saw the funny side of that.

She took me to a tiny park, and I was surprised to find that it was an exact replica of the one in which I had found myself when I had first entered the "dimension". On the opposite side from the entrance, however, there was an enclosure, and a gate beyond which I could see a narrow red path leading upwards, obviously to a natty little villa with a white stone veranda just discernible through the trees. I remarked upon the joint, and Dianne said:

"I am so glad you like it, Franklin Bruhn, because it is yours."

"No!"

"It is where you will live while you are here. Perhaps I should have said *when* you are here."

I d'dn't question her on the difference at that moment, but asked if I had to pursue my studies in the villa.

"Of course," she said. "Until you have learned the art of dispensation."

"What might that be, honey? If you don't mind my——"

"Of course not. It is the art of discarding your body and of course all its demands."

"I've got to do that?"

"Of course." She stood straight before me and looked into my face. I thought her lovely eyes were troubled as she asked: "You wish to become one of us, do you not?"

I guess I, too, must have looked a little troubled at that. I rumpled my hair, took a long look at her, then said:

"Well, now, Dianne——" I glanced round, furtively, before continuing—"that's what we would call a leading question. You see, I haven't got the hang of everything yet. To me it all seems a little—shall we say 'screwy?' "

She looked at me blankly at first, then suddenly smiled. It was a wondrous smile, and I thought that my vision was growing dim in the face of its wonder. Then I realized that she was fading out, and a feeling of great sadness came over me. I didn't want her to go like that. I called her name—called it several times, but she didn't answer. Then I knew that once again she was close to me. I could feel her presence and was again conscious of the sweet perfume I had associated with her since our first meeting. I felt warm hands touch my face, draw my head downwards. An instant later, warm, sweet lips were pressed to mine, and they stayed there for a long, long time. When it was over I felt differently about my presence in the strange dimension. I spoke to Dianne again, but this time I only breathed her name. There was no answer, and I knew that I was alone. I went through the gate and entered the grounds of the villa.

I could find no fault with the place. From the outside it was the last word in attractiveness; inside it was furnished in the latest American modernistic style. All except the creep who was sitting in the lounge waiting for me. He was around six feet high with practically no other dimensions. He was so thin I didn't know, at first, whether he was in my dimension or in one of his own. He must have been ninety if he was a day, although his voice, when he spoke, was that of a man of thirty or so. He smiled at me,

good-naturedly, showing reasonably good teeth, and held out his hand.

"I have waited quite a time for you, Mister Bruhn," he said, and his grip was warm and firm so I guessed he, at least, was in the land of the living. "I am Stroh Seven, and it is my duty to tutor you in the art of using the dimensions for purposes which have probably been explained to you. We will commence our studies to-morrow, but I thought I had better introduce myself. I hope you are going to like being with us, Mister Bruhn. You will find it different from your life on Earth, of course, but time will help you to reconcile yourself to our way of life."

"Time?" I said. "Then—say, about how long do you suppose it ought to take me to master this course of yours?"

He pursed his lips, then said:

"You are already in the first dimension, of course. To attain the other dimensions might take you a month. But to achieve ultimate dispensation takes many years, Mister——"

"What? Why, for heck's sake, man, how long do you figure I intend to stay in this place? Why——"

I stopped at the look in his eyes. He placed his skinny hand upon my arm, and said, quietly:

"Mister Bruhn, as I told you, you are in the first dimension, and even from that there is no possible return to your other life on Earth. *You are with us for ever, Mister Bruhn.*"

CHAPTER V

AT first I couldn't take it seriously, but Stroh Seven started to talk to me, and after a while he began to produce an effect which he could have produced just as well by slowly immersing me in very cold water. It seemed I had been chosen, out of all the Earth's teeming millions, to be the Earth's saviour. I would have to return to the Earth periodically, of course, because I knew the ropes there even better than Illion the First, who had made a number of visits, but who could not quite feel the general temper of the Earth's peoples. That was because he had never actually been an Earthman like me.

And now I would only be able to visit Earth in spiritual form but probably with a normal appearance.

I was perspiring freely by this time, and I had the feeling that my innards had faded away. Presently I got around to asking one or two questions. I asked why all the talk about visiting Earth as though we were not already . . . .

His answer came pat.

"In our dimension, Mister Bruhn," he said, "we do not really exist in the way you understand existence. Unless it helps you to imagine that we dwell, say, in space. You will understand that much better later on, but we are, for the moment, in proximity to your Earth."

"But what particular part of the Earth?" I asked. "And suppose some one saw——"

He laughed.

"Nobody could possibly see us, or touch us. We decided to make a sort of temporary base, however, as far as possible from the normal human tracks and habitations. If, for instance, you were suddenly to be released from this dimension, which can only happen when certain moments of our time corresponds exactly with certain moments of Earth's time, you would find yourself somewhere around the borders of Mongolia and Manchuria. But have no fear of anyone contacting us, for we are enveloped—this city and the whole of the country you have seen from the walls—is an *aura* which is completely inperceptible and impenetrable."

"So," I murmured, "those darned flying saucers didn't come from the Moon after all!"

He shook his head. I went on:

"And the object of the guys inside 'em was, like your object now, a peaceable one? In other words you are dead set on saving the world—my world—whether the people there want to be saved or not, by peaceably rubbing most of them out if they don't see reason?"

"But remember, Mister Bruhn, that it is often necessary to exert force in order to prevent people from destroying themselves in a horrible way."

"Cruel to be kind, I guess you mean."

"Of course. If you were convinced, my friend, that *you* could

provide for suffering humanity a state wherein *all* could live in freedom and peace, to enjoy health, wealth, and happiness to the fullest degree, would you not feel inclined to impose that state upon humanity even if, in the process, you were obliged to eliminate those who chose stupidly to stand in the way?"

I pursed my lips, thrust my hands into my coat pockets, and moved to a French window that gave a view of the lawn and the path by which I had entered the grounds from the little park.

"Guess I would have liked notice of that question, Mister Stroh Seven," I told him. "The peoples of Earth don't take kindly to forced propaganda, and I don't know . . . "

"You will, Mister Bruhn, you will," he chuckled. "For the moment, however, I must leave you, and I will attend upon you to-morrow. Even you, I think, will succumb to our propaganda in time, especially when it is aided by Illion's second-in-command —the sweet lady Dianne. When you have attained the ultimate in dispensation, and can transport your mind freely into the realm enjoyed by such minds, you will realize how little is contained in an ordinary Earth-life when compared with the eternity of cultural bliss enjoyed by those who have relinquished their bodily state."

I didn't see him go, but I replied to his farewell, a trifle absently because at that moment I saw Dianne walking in the park beyond the gate at the bottom of the path. I opened the French window and stepped on to the lawn. I could have cried out as I did so, for I saw another figure in the park, immediately behind Dianne. He was dressed like the little vegetable guys, but he was much larger. I wasn't interested in his size, however, nor the look of murderous hate upon his face. It was the stealthy creeping motions that got me; that and the ten-inch dagger he carried in his hand; its point about level with his chest. Before I could let out a yell, or take a run down that path, Dianne stopped walking, something which the guy with the dagger did *not* do. He took one more step forward, this time quickly, and I saw him swing himself for the deadly thrust.

That was as far as he got towards plunging the weapon into the girl's back. He held that attitude as though suddenly ossified, or as though he were part of a cinema-film that had jammed. The look of murderous hate upon his ill-favoured face had now given place to abject fear. As I went down the path at the double Dianne turned, her hands clasped easily before her, and regarded her

would-be attacker with a serene smile. As I reached the scene two of the fruity faced little fellows appeared. From the fact that they carried night-sticks, and wore pistols in their belts, I figured they formed part of the city's constabulary. The man with the dagger still held his menacing pose as the two officers fell in beside him, their batons raised, their eyes raised inquiringly to Dianne. To my surprise, she shook her head, pointing instead to the pistols in the official belts. At once the men drew their guns, stepped back a pace, then aimed them at the paralyzed wretch. A thin light sprang from the muzzles of the pistols, striking the knifer amidships. Within seconds he crumpled into a small heap of ashes, leaving the faintest wisp of smoke where he had been standing. The two policemen saluted, then toddled off out of the park.

Dianne turned to me and sighed. I rumpled my hair and regarded her with mixed feelings. Her decision had certainly shocked me, when those cops wanted to haul the miscreant along to the lock-up, maybe. When I mentioned this she shook her head.

"You do not understand, Franklin Bruhn. My decision was the kindest. The man was a worker, but one of the troublesome ones. He and his class know only assassination as the means of bringing a request to the notice of their rulers. Had I allowed those officers to arrest him, he would have been tortured unmercifully, then hung by his ears from a high column in the main street to be stoned to death by the rabble. They would have taken hours to do it, being skilled in aiming their stones so as to hurt but not to produce either death or even unconsciousness for a long time. I know that he would have preferred it as I ordered."

"I agree with you, honey," I said. "And I'm darn glad he didn't manage to——"

I stopped, suddenly, and was about to ask a question when she laughed, and said:

"It was easy. When you are merely a 'mind' you are aware of everything around you. I had simply to exert a tiny portion of my will to reduce him to the condition in which the policemen found him. It is one of the advantages—I suppose."

I thought I detected a strange note in her voice, and I once more reached out to touch her arm. I got a shock when I found it was really there, soft, and smooth, and warm. I got a greater shock, however, when she gave a half-smothered scream, and jerked her arm away from me, staring at me with horror-stricken eyes. Then she closed her eyes, and I saw a violent shudder pass

through her. An instant later I was staring at the trees beyond the spot where she had been standing.

"Dianne!"

She came back to me almost immediately, but—it was only her voice. I was sitting on the white seat opposite the gate at the bottom of the garden. There were strange questions in my mind, hazy and mixed up, but still questions. Her sweet voice drove them all away. She said:

"I'm sorry, Franklin Bruhn. I'm terribly sorry—about that."

"That's O.K., honey," I told her. "That is if you like to tell me what you are sorry about."

"Listen."

I had the impression that she was seating herself beside me, but that was surely nuts because when it was only her voice . . . . All the same . . . that perfume . . .

"Franklin Bruhn, I want you to promise that you will never refer to this afternoon's incident—not to anyone with whom you may speak."

"Do you mean that guy with the tooth-pick?"

"Of course not. I mean about the fact that you discovered you could see me and also *touch* me."

"Why—why of course, if you want me——"

"I do, I do. Please swear——"

"I swear it, honey. And now that the secret is safe—why not, say once in a little while . . . "

"No, no, *no*, Franklin Bruhn. You do not realize that—that—oh . . . "

She was silent for a moment, then:

"I wish I could impress you with the seriousness of what I did. If Illion even suspected it might cost me my life—my eternal life in our dimension. You see, for aeons of time it has been understood that once the ultimate state of complete dispensation has been achieved, and the mind freed from the encumbrance of the body, there can be no return, except by presuming an image, as I have done for you; as Illion himself did so that you could converse with him more comfortably. But, as you have found, the image cannot be touched, because, well, because it *is* only an image—an illusion."

"A very beautiful one at that," I breathed.

There was a pause; then she said:

"You—liked that image, Franklin Bruhn?"

"Dianne," I said, "if only you could assume that image, and become the person I saw—become her in the flesh, I mean . . . "

I heard her quick intake of breath, and when she spoke again her voice was low and slightly tremulous.

"That," she said, "is what I achieved to-day—but only after years of secret and illegal experiment." Again she lowered her voice. "You see, I am much younger than any of our minds, and I have been to many planets, and have studied many things in Creation, and in many ways I have been unable to accept, blindly, all that I have been taught. I do not say, mind, that ours is not the ideal state, but I have been curious to study the ways of all the nice people I have seen on my journeys to Earth—not merely by touching down on the planet in one of our machines which you call flying saucers, or by mixing with them in spiritual form. I have wanted to be just like them, to have their exact feelings and emotions. I have wanted to know what it would be like to—to——"

"To fall in love?" I suggested.

She laughed, and said:

"I was going to say 'to eat', although I should imagine it would be a very strange sensation—to one who has never experienced it."

I sighed, and said I guessed so, but I wasn't sure which sensation she meant.

"And to-day?" I asked.

"To-day I succeeded in producing myself as *you* imagined me, and when that assassin came I was struggling against the wish to test the results of my experiments upon you. You see, Franklin Bruhn, I want to go to Earth as an ordinary girl, live there for a time, and form impressions of the actual life as a human, not just as a mind. But—if Illion knew——"

"*He does*!"

I almost leaped from the seat at the voice that seemed to ring round that enclosed little park. I heard Dianne give the tiniest scream, then I saw him, standing plainly before me. He said:

"Bring yourself into view, Dianne. At once."

The tone was imperious; his expression merely one of concentration. I became conscious of the perfume again, and quite quickly Dianne appeared at my side. It was only then that Illion the First smiled, and said:

"Dianne—you should have known better than imagine there could be anything I do not know in our dimension. I have watched the course of your experiments for quite a time, and you may be relieved to know that I have found myself approving of them. I have now decided even to assist you in perfecting the last stages."

"You have?"

"Yes, because I can see that our propaganda could be arranged much more effectively if you, as well as Mister Bruhn, had known the experiences to be found on Earth only as a human. In other words, Dianne, I have decided to allow you a short sojourn on Earth with Mister Bruhn as your escort, to indulge in all the things known to humans so that you may bring back to us first-hand knowledge of how we might quickly win the human race over to our ideals. But——"

He smiled a little as he saw Dianne and I exchange astonished glances.

"But—" he went on, "it will be arranged by me so that you return to this dimension before tbe end of your sojourn under the pain of the extreme penalty."

He turned to me, and very solemnly said:

"I charge you, Mister Bruhn, to return to this dimension at or before the appointed time, which you will by then have learned to do. If you do not, then on the instant of time which I will fix, both you and Dianne will cease to be—in every sense. On that instant, Mister Bruhn, you will both lose your lives, and will be buried in Earth's soil like other humans but with this difference—your spirits will suffer extermination, *which means that you will have sacrificed your chances of achieving the Life Eternal.* In other words, your very souls will be lost as well as your bodies."

CHAPTER VI

I LEARNED a lot in the weeks that followed—learned more about dimensions than I would have thought possible. I had never been much of a student of science, even at college, so old Stroh 7's tuition came harder to me than it might have done

to many fellows. We ploughed at the studies from morning until almost night, except when I grew so weary of it that I decided to throw the towel in for that day. The more I learned, however the more it was borne in on me that by coming to the dimension, which I couldn't help in any case, I had placed myself into the keeping of a power that grew more terrifying with each step I took towards my proficiency.

I saw a good deal of Dianne, or perhaps I should have said "heard" a good deal of her, for although she usually took the image I was beginning to appreciate more and more each day, it was a long time before she again assumed the human state in which I had found her that day in the little park.

"You see, Franklin Bruhn," she told me, "I, too, am studying to perfect the art of materializing completely, and remember it is much harder for me because I have never possessed a body. I am sure I should not even know what to do with it most of the——"

She stopped, and looked hard at me for some moments. I tried to get the decision over the smile that was bent on coming to my face. Then:

"By the way," she said. "You are to be allowed on one of the machines to-morrow night. It is making one of the periodical observation flights to Earth, and—Illion is permitting me to make the journey with you."

"He is?"

"Yes, I have never experienced the actual comfort of a trip, my visits have been in spirit form only. It is very complicated, getting through the barrier, and the action has to be timed to the split second. The machine, could of course, make the distance in almost no time, but they take about an hour so as to obviate the possibility of us landing too near an inhabited area. Won't you be thrilled to make the trip, Franklin Bruhn?"

I couldn't expect her to know just how thrilled. At the back of my mind, of course, was the idea that I might have a chance to take a powder once we reached my natural dimension. Almost at once Dianne hit that on the head by reminding me that I no longer belonged to that dimension, and that, according to Illion, I could never again return, permanently, to that state.

We spent the rest of that day in a visit to the country below. We achieved the drop in a miniature "saucer", and I was taken to the factories where the machines were produced by prototypes

of the little workers who populated the city above. Dianne helped and encouraged me to try my mental powers when meeting other "minds", highly-intellectual minds most of them were, too, and I achieved some little success at meeting them on their own level, principally, I suppose, because we held to things I knew about, such as details and methods of production. There seemed to be thousands of those 'minds', but with my mental powers appreciably stepped up by the tutor, Stroh 7, I found it tolerably easy to keep up with their mental processes. I returned to the elevated city with Dianne, feeling that I had put in a day's real hard work.

That evening Illion sent for me. I entered the building which I still thought of as a palace in some trepidation. I must have looked that way, too, for Illion immediately smiled reassuringly, and said:

"Do not worry, Mister Bruhn. I have certain news for you."

He signalled for me to take a seat. Then:

"As you have progressed fairly well with your studies, and as Dianne has completed her method of temporarily assuming human shape, it would seem a waste of time sending you merely to accompany what is, after all, only a reconnaissance trip. Instead, I propose to permit you the promised sojourn on Earth, starting very soon. How long would you require to stay there in order to gather such detailed information as I require, and at the same time enable Dianne to study the social side of life on Earth?"

I affected to consider, For my own part, of course, I wanted our stay to be as long as possible, but I didn't wish to spoil things. I said:

"Around three months in our time. It's little enough to do all the things there are to do."

He nodded.

"Yes. That seems fair enough, and it is a mere nothing in the time of this dimension. Dianne will be briefed in most of the things I wish to know—radio and television are very important, as we intend to superimpose our propaganda on the different programmes when we begin our drive. At certain times we will cause all Earth's transmissions to fade out and give place to our own material, which will be arranged in such a way that its intrusion will be almost imperceptible."

I smiled, and added:

"Until the radio people get around to the probable cause of it."

"Of course, but they will be able to do nothing to stop us, and in any case it will be a long time before they do even notice the intrusion."

"You really mean that?" I asked.

"Absolutely, Mister Bruhn. You see, the actual interruption will occupy less than a second of Earth's time, and will no doubt be put down to a fault in Earth's transmission. A technical—er——"

"Technical hitch."

"Right. What is more, it will consist at first of an ultra-rapid projection in the form of mass-hypnosis impregnated with a tiny dose of the gentler form of our propaganda. As a matter of fact it will be a considerable time before either audience or technicians are even aware that they have been injected with the mental serum we have prepared, which will be sent out regularly, and which will be transmitted to every radio and television set in the world."

I figured if that were so then he certainly had something. I told him so. He shrugged, and smiled again, then held up a warning finger.

"At the same time, Mister Bruhn," he said, "please do not forget my warning as regards returning to this dimension at the proper time. One point—you need not worry about your absence from your world. I doubt if you will find yourself with even a single explanation to make, because you have only been, as you might say, 'out of circulation', for a matter of forty-eight hours."

It was almost unbelievable, but I had to take his word for it, and I didn't care anyway so long as Dianne and I could make that trip. Illion gave me ten days before the period when the time factors of the two dimensions would coincide exactly and allow us to pass through.

I "met" Dianne in the city square when I left the palace, and we walked slowly towards the outer walls. I told her of Illion's decision to cancel the trip by machine. She was excited because the other trip had been brought forward.

"I can scarcely wait ten days, Franklin Bruhn," she sighed, as I halted at the wall and commenced to lean against it. She had made herself visible by that time, and her lovely face was alight with anticipation as she babbled on: "To think that I will be able

to drive in an auto., go to the theatre with you, see films, and—and——"

"But Dianne," I said, "surely these things are not new to you. With all the knowledge gained in this dimension . . . "

"Ah yes," she cried, "but I have not *experienced* these things like you have. It is true that we know all your inventions; most of them are earth-years out of date compared with the things we can make here, and the novelty of such things now passes us by—as *we* experience them. Your way of experiencing things is different from ours, and—I am excited about it all."

"Well, there's plenty of it for you to experience, if that's the way it is," I told her, and looked at her in the moonlight. "Dianne, I whispered, presently, "are you—that is——?"

She nodded, almost imperceptibly, and at once I stretched out my hand and found her arm warm and quite firm. There was no help for it; I just had to fold her in my arms, but before our lips could meet I felt her body stiffen, and she strained away from me, turning her head as though listening. Before I could remonstrate, or appeal to her, I saw the look of horror in her eyes, and suddenly she clung to me tightly, and cried:

"Quick, Franklin Bruhn. Recite the sixth invocation. Do it quickly or we are lost."

It took but a few seconds, ranted in the strange tongue Stoh 7 had taught me. At once I felt myself as light as air, and there was no need for me to lean on either the city wall or——

I got a shock when I saw that the wall wasn't there; neither was the ground on which I had been standing with Dianne. I looked for the city and saw only a black cloud that was quickly becoming lighter, as though an immense light were fighting its way through it. Then the explosion came, or rather what little Dianne and I felt of it. The light came through the cloud but it seemed to be more like white-hot metal than mere incandescence. There was one moment of semi-consciousness during which Dianne and I seemed to move through millions of miles of space at a speed which left a trail of light behind it. Then all was peace, and we were relaxing on what looked like the deck of an ocean-going liner, except that there was no sea beyond the deck-rail, just cloud and a faint mist drifting slowly beneath us. From far below came a rather eerie light, but it was sufficient for me to see that Dianne and I had apparently come through safely—whatever it was that—

A glass door opened beside us, and I saw a brilliantly-lighted saloon, and it was Illion the First who beckoned us. He was smiling, and he gripped both our hands when we stepped into the light. I was surprised to find that *he* was apparently solid, too. He laughed and said:

"Of course—it feels that way, because you are now on the same mental plane as the rest of us. You have done well, Mister Bruhn, and you gave that incantation without fault, fortunately for you. Had you failed to do so I am afraid we should have lost you. Better get some relaxation."

"But—but what happened?" I asked. "What happened to the city?"

"The city is a pile of dust," he said. That was an atomic explosion aimed to destroy us. It was set off by our own workers, or at least the discontented section of them. Fortunately 'minds', like ourselves, are able to detect the imminence of such things a fraction before they occur, and we are able to project ourselves on to another plane in the way you have learned so well. Unfortunately, this insurrection might well delay the trip which you and Dianne were to have made to Earth."

CHAPTER VII

I COULD have felt upset about that except that, on this new plane, I seemed to have acquired a feeling of extreme contentment, especially as I could now see Dianne continuously. All the same . . . .

Dianne smiled at me from her position on the comfortable lounge where we were sitting and watching the rest of the company, all intellectual-looking people, both men and women, many of them most certainly very high executives, to judge from their demeanour, and their attitudes of near-equality when they were conversing with Illion I. In a quiet voice she said:

"Don't worry, Franklin Bruhn, we shall make that trip to Earth, but—this is revolution, and it may take a little time to put things right."

"Revolution," I said. "I can't believe it, Dianne.

"But why?"

"Because I had the idea your dimension was so perfect—the renovated version of the Garden of Eden, in fact—that there could be no discontent with everybody happy and—and——"

"It has been on the way for a long time," she said.

"And Illion didn't know about it?"

"Of course. He knows all things, but—there must be a reason why he has allowed it to get so close—for its leaders to become so powerful, even though they imagined all their meetings were secret."

"What will he do about it?"

"What would *you* do about it, Mister Bruhn, if you were I?"

I started, for I hadn't noticed that Illion had left the group with whom he had been conversing and had come upon Dianne and I from behind. Before I could turn my head he had placed himself in front of us. He still looked as though he could have been the principal of a college, and now that he was standing he had an athletic grace to his figure. He smiled, and repeated his question. I said:

"Well, I guess I should first try to find out the cause of the trouble—what the workers are after."

"In other words you would negotiate with them?"

"Sure."

"How would you negotiate, Mister Bruhn, with a species brought into being merely to perform certain functions of labour —certain movements and nothing else. In that sense they were perfect; their lives——"

"Were not—perfect," I said. "By one heck of a long way. Otherwise, why do you suppose they let go with that atom bomb just now? Men don't go to that——"

"Men? They are almost entirely vegetable matter. They get free food, are allowed to watch tele. shows at certain times; and we allow them——"

"That's just it, Mister Illion," I said, feeling that I was entitled to warm up on the subject since he had been the one to start it. "You *allow* them. Everything they have is *allowed.* They are allowed to breathe, I take it, only by the kind offices of the committee of works, or whatever the department is called. But you can't get away with it; you can't——"

"I can destroy them."

"Then who would do the chores of this dimension?"

He laughed, and said:

"You do not realize, of course, that I could have a fresh set of workers bred from stock in about a month. In fact, at this season, I do not doubt that our farms are quite well-stocked."

"Farms? Stocks? Do you mean that those guys don't—er—?"

"Of course not, Mister Bruhn. We keep specimen stocks from which to breed according to our requirements, They are not mammalian; we reproduce them in miniature by a spawning process, and enlarge them scientifically by the use of incubators. They live, perhaps five years at the most."

I was astonished, but I managed to say:

"And yet some of them found time to grow discontented?"

"It will avail them nothing."

"But it *has* availed them something; they've struck an almighty blow for their cause, which, I take it, has got something to do with freedom—or at least the improvement of such lives as they nearly lead. Darn it all, haven't they just blown a whole city to the four winds in one go?"

"You speak of freedom, Mister Bruhn, as thought it were something to be desired."

"Well," I asked, "isn't it?"

"When it is possessed by intellectuals—yes! But to give complete freedom to the masses is to ask for revolution, which is merely an excuse to take by violence the things which they are incapable of obtaining by the exercise of intelligence. You have the same thing on your Earth, of course." He smiled again, good-humouredly, and pointed a finger at me. "Which brings us back to the subject of your mission, Mister Bruhn."

I sighed, and murmured:

"Here we go again." Our eyes met for a moment, and I got the idea that he was thoroughly enjoying the thing. I went on, still holding his gaze: "You know—it's going to be harder than you think, bringing the people of Earth to heel. You can't just rub *them* all out and then reproduce them; they don't grow up as quickly as your vegetable labour corps. Besides, there are races on Earth who have never known conquest, and there are those who would never accept it, not even if you beat them flat."

He nodded, then said:

"Which is the reason why I am in favour of the propaganda method rather than force. It is true that a nation is not conquered until it *accepts* conquest, which is the finest argument in favour of persuaslon, and—our methods of persuasion are *bound* to be successful."

I let it go at that, but I had quite a number of discussions with Illion the First. That was when he spared the time between bouts of directing the liquidating of the rebels and the building of a complete new city. That he was not put out in any way by my questioning his proposed methods for the "saving" of my world was proved by his readiness to weigh any ideas I might put forward. He was a good sport, at any rate, especially as the spirit of rebellion amongst the workers was far more deeply rooted than he had thought. I guess that his assessment of the workers' original dumbness must have blinded him to the possibility of their jobs bringing about a certain amount of intellectual improvement. It was quite a time before reports reached me, usually through Dianne, that things in the industrial precincts were once again working normally, and that the idea of even questioning the ordering of their lives had been completely exorcized from the pudding-like texture of the things the workers had in place of brains.

Even then there was a hitch in the arrangements for the trip to Earth which Dianne and I were to make. We were still living on the "liner", as I thought of it, and having achieved the plane necessary to get me there I was able to live entirely without food or sleep. As far as I could tell I was at that time the equal, in most ways, of the other "minds", with the exception of Illion himself, and his second-in-command, Dianne.

"But, Dianne," I said, when she told me of the postponement of the trip, "it will make it rather awkward for me to explain my absence. A couple of days is bad enough when your friends know that you were flying an airplane, but longer than that—why, they'll be searching the Pacific with half Uncle Sam's . . . "

"Don't worry," she laughed. "Perhaps Illion has some ideas about that. In any case, Franklin Bruhn, it is your own fault."

"How come?"

"You remember arguing the matter of the workers' rights? I think it has given him the idea that you are still too 'earthbound' to be entrusted with part of the mission to which we are pledged. He has decided that you must achieve another plane, and then

reach Earth by ordinary materialization."

"Hell! What difference will that make? I thought we were going to find ourselves flying that kite of mine over the Pacific and then——"

"We were, but Illion's idea is that you are not far enough removed from the human race to be trusted both with the journey to Earth, and your return here when the trip is over. Your achievment of yet another plane will, he says, put the final seal upon your absorption into this dimension."

I thought that one over, then said:

"He might be right at that. Then—he could be wrong." I gave her a smile, and added: "You never know—with a Yank."

She was looking at me in a puzzled kind of way. I would have loved to take her into my arms, but no matter how desirable she looked, it was quite impossible to do such a thing in that dimension All the same, there were plenty of compensations, and it gave me unlimited pleasure to commune with Dianne in the way I did. At least I could always see her, and the more I did that, the more I began to realize that without the presence of the lovely Dianne, whether I lived on Earth or were forced to spend the rest of my immortal life as a mere "mind", existence of any kind and in any form would be an impossible place for the one-time American Franklin Bruhn.

We strolled the outer deck of the "liner", discussing most of the things Dianne wanted to experience when she found herself on Earth. I did my best to help her imagine the things she would find there, but the more I talked, the more I had to strive for adequate expressions. In other words, and to my astonishment and alarm, *I was finding it increasingly difficult to remember my own reactions to life in the other world.*

CHAPTER VIII

I STUDIED hard to achieve the next plane, and—I mean that. It was very hard indeed, although I seemed to have all the executives on that 'liner' as tutors. I never saw Stroh Seven again, and guessed that even he wasn't competent to take me any

higher than he had done. There were times when I knew real despair, because I wanted that one trip to Earth as I had never wanted anything when the whole of Earth had been mine for the asking. Panic came when I realized that as my anxiety increased my powers of achievement diminished. Finally, when I was on the point of throwing in the towel, Dianne returned to me. I hadn't seen her for what seemed like years. I gathered she was busy working on the after-effects of the rebellion, as well as supervising work on the sight of the new city. She laughed my fears away, and said:

"It is just that you are too anxious, Franklin Bruhn. Take a short rest from your studies. We will talk of what we intend to do when we get to Earth, and you will go back to your studies refreshed. Yes?"

"I don't know, Dianne. I can't seem to memorize those all-fired recitations like I did for the other planes."

"And yet you must—if we are to make that trip."

"Sure, but——"

"Listen."

Her voice was soft, and sweeter than I had ever known it. She soothed me with her smile, and once again I knew the fragrance of that perfume she used. Though why perfume . . .

"Franklin Bruhn."

She was beckoning me, and I followed her out of the "saloon" —where we never either ate or drank. We went along to the outer deck, and I suddenly figured that the eternal night and mist, and the ghostly light away beyond the rail might be part of my trouble. I felt that, with the aid of a spot of sunshine, I could have sucked up that memory stuff like—like wine, although I was well on the way to losing my memories of what that tasted like.

We were in a small room, or maybe I should have said "cabin" so as to keep everything in conformity with my idea that we were actually on a ship. There was something illuminating the place—something that was neither sunlight nor artificial light as I knew it. Dianne closed the door, and the light seemed to change ever so slightly. Now it had a soothing quality, as though an extra slide had been drawn over the lens of lantern. I didn't pay much attention to the furnishings of the room except the two chairs in the centre. They were facing each other, and about a yard apart. One glance at those chairs gave me the idea that they could be the

most comfortable I had ever seen. When Dianne took one and motioned me to the other I realized that I didn't know a thing—about comfort.

I scarcely seemed to touch the chair as I sank into the space between its heavily-padded arms. I had never known a chair that invited relaxation like this one did. I used to boast about the comfort of the chairs in certain of my clubs back home, but this one had them all beaten. The instant you sat in it you automatically sighed, and began to think about the forty winks you'd been promising yourself when you had the time. It gently but firmly demanded sleep; which was the reason, I guess, why Dianne made me use it while she gave me the hypnotic treatment.

"It is quite painless, Franklin Bruhn," she smiled, when she had told me her intentions. You will close your eyes and sleep. While you are asleep I will recite the whole of your studies, including all the incantations. When you awake you will know them all perfectly. It will seem that you have slept but a second, but you will be thoroughly refreshed. What is more the dreary waiting time will have passed, for it will then be merely a matter of hours before the next coincidence of time—the moment when Earth time and ours reach the point where we can pass through the barrier." Her voice dropped to a husky whisper. "Think of that, Franklin Bruhn. When you awake it will be almost time for you and I to make that trip—to Earth. Always with Illion's permission, of course. And now you must relax. Force everything from you—every thought. Your mind should be completely free when you pass into the hypnotic state."

Dianne did a fine job; I learned that stuff without knowing I had done it. and my hopeless feelings about it had gone. The principal feeling I knew was one of eager anticipation about the forthcoming trip, but it was tinged with a little sadness, knowing, as I did, that I could never again be a free American citizen. Henceforth I would be one of the "minds", but, as though in compensation, Dianne was always with me now, although I could never touch her any more than she could touch me. The strange thing was that there was even a feeling of satisfaction in just that.

The time was approaching and we had had our final briefing. It had been decided that, in view of the recent revolt, Dianne and I would perform the take-off through the barrier from the upper deck of the "liner". As Illion told me:

"It would be awkward if there happened to be another explosion in your absence, and if your taking-off point were to be destroyed. You see, you *must* return to the point from which you started, and that is the reason for our decision. Dianne will be sure to remember that when the time comes for you both to return. She will also calculate the coinciding times. And now, it is time for you both to prepare. I wish you good luck, and I hope you enjoy yourselves. In fact I am sure that you will.

Our preparations were easy enough; Dianne and I had rehearsed them several times, and when we finally went on to the upper deck I experienced the feelings that must surely be experienced by every wanderer when he sets foot on the last lap of his journey home after being in foreign parts for many years.

It was strange, however, not to be able to see Dianne any more. Having transferred ourselves to the plane in which we were merely "minds", there was no necessity for visual evidence of each other's presence. It seemed darker up there than on the lower deck, where they had light from the saloons to augment the ghostly glimmer from beneath the mists and the clouds. For some moments I had a feeling of apprehension, then I heard Dianne's voice. It was so faint it seemed almost part of the slight wind that was blowing in from the vast space around us. The voice whispered:

"Franklin Bruhn, I could not tell you this until now. Listen very carefully and memorize the few words I will speak, but do not speak them yourself—now. They are to be spoken after the third incantation, and they should coincide exactly with the moment for taking off."

As far as I know there is no written form of the queer language in which the incantations are spoken, so there is no point in trying to set down the impossible, and anyway, they mean nothing except to those who speak them. There were only three words and Dianne made sure that I memorized them. Then—the moment was upon us, with just enough time for us to prepare our minds before making the final effort.

There was nothing physical about it, although there was supposed to be something of the kind connected with the process of stepping through the barrier from one dimension to the other. There was nothing to it, once Dianne had given me the mental contact and we had run through the three short incantations, followed, without a hitch, by the three short words she had added.

I was conscious of no change whatever, except that one second I had been standing on that ghostly upper deck, and the next I was standing in the miniature lounge of the tiny chalet I had always kept at Lakewood, on the southern shore of Lake Erie, Ohio.

What was more, I felt *real*; in fact I *was* real. I felt fine, and the sun was shining through the pinewoods and on the great stretch of water outside. I looked at Dianne. She was real, too, and I gasped at the sheer loveliness . . . .

Then I caught the look of mingled embarrassment and accusation in her eyes, and I hopped out into the hall, my ears burning, and for the first time in my life, I believe—*actually blushing.* I put my mouth near the door and called out:

"O.K., O.K., honey, but—how was I to know? There should be a tape measure in the bureau in there. Sing out some measurements and I'll hop along to the stores in Lakewood and buy *something* for you to wear."

CHAPTER IX

I DID fairly well in Lakewood, with the help of a sales girl who was around Dianne's sizes. I took the stuff by taxi, along with a small load of groceries. I was feeling hungry, and wondered how Dianne was feeling, never having eaten anything in the whole of her existence.

I figured it had been a good idea to fix on my chalet at the last moment. To have materialized in almost any other place would surely have caused trouble. I was lucky in returning to Earth in the suit I had been wearing when flying my plane, but for Dianne, who had never known earthly garments . . . .

She was quite a time dressing up in the things I passed to her in the lounge. I told myself that dames usually were, but she afterwards confessed to a certain amount of difficulty with some of the unfamiliar gadgets. When at last I saw her in those fashionable clothes, however, it nearly brought on another attack of embarrasment. That salesgirl in Lakewood sure knew what was what. She wasn't the only one, either. Dianne had wished upon herself a figure that would have knocked Venus's eye out, and the

bright, summery outfit she had chosen did nothing whatever towards spoiling it. There was a large mirror in there so I guessed she knew the answer when she laughed, and asked:

"I am nice, Franklin Bruhn—or not?"

I told her she could bet on it. Then:

"But I do not *feel* good," she told me. "I feel—funny. Here."

I grinned, and said:

"Sure you do. You're real, now—like me. And we're both hungry. We've got to eat."

"Yes. That must be it." She spun round to the mirror, and parted her red lips to show two rows of pearls. "These teeth, of course—you eat with them, but—they look too nice to do that."

"Don't be silly," I said. "That's what the things are for."

She turned back to me.

"Then, Franklin Bruhn, you will have to be patient with me, because I am sure I will never——"

"Of course you will. Maybe you'll need a little practice, so we'd best eat our first meal here. I brought in some groceries; guess you'll have to be patient with *me* when it comes to cooking something, although fried eggs and bacon shouldn't be tough enough to get me down. Personally I'm so hungry I could eat a restaurant clean through to the stove-pipe in the back alley. You look at the scenery, honey, while I cart this stuff into the kitchen and get to work."

"Nonsense," she laughed. "I am coming with you to find out how it is done."

"O.K."

When we finally got round to eating the breakfast she shaped better with knife and fork than many folks I've seen at the same job after years of practice. When she was through she said:

"That was so good I could go on eating that food forever."

"Don't you worry," I said, "there are scores of dishes just as nice."

Just for the fun of it we washed up the dishes and utensils, and I switched on the radio in the lounge so that we could have a little music while we worked. I noticed that Dianne had no difficulty in following the tunes. Her singing voice was as nice as the rest of her. When we were in the lounge again she said:

"You know, when I visited Earth in spirit, I saw people dancing. I memorized most of the things they did, and, you know, Franklin Bruhn, I—I should like to try it. This music has that kind of an effect on me. Should it?"

"Well of course. That's the idea of the guys who play it. Let's go."

I took her in my arms and we danced easily and gently around the lounge. She danced so divinely, and nestled so close, I figured here was something *I* could go on doing forever. It gave me a terrific thrill and I hated to break it up, but we couldn't stay in that little chalet. Dianne had come to Earth to see and do everything possible, and I was the guy deputed to show her around. I had fixed with the taxi-driver to call around for us later, and he arrived when I had packed the remainder of Dianne's gear in a small grip, and had thrown a few things like shaving, hair and tooth brushes into a case for myself.

I should have liked to have driven the six hundred miles by road to New York, but none of my cars was at Lakewood, and Dianne had to experience a train journey sometime. Besides, although the journey by rail was much longer, the railroad from Lakewood ran clear along the great Lake Erie, which is bigger than its neighbour, Ontario, to Buffalo and Rochester, and I guessed it was a fine chance to let Dianne take a look at Niagra. I never enjoyed a trip so much. Dianne was like a child in some ways, and delighted in everything, thereby delighting me. When at last we were settled in the train for little old New York, I got around to making plans, throwing together a story to account for her presence, and so on, but I'll admit it was a half-hearted attempt. For some reason it was darned hard to concentrate on anything except Dianne herself, with her sitting so close to me in the Pullman; especially as she had taken time out in Rochester to visit a swell hairdresser and lay in her own choice of make-up, perfume, and such delightful feminine accessories. I decided to let planning go hang, even my original idea of us staying at separate hotels in New York.

We got there in the morning, and—it was summer in New York. It was also summer in plenty of other places as well, but in New York summer means a lot. The whole city wears a new look when the last of the winter slush has been washed away. There were new striped and coloured awnings over the shops, fresh paint everywhere, even on the buses and the taxis, the cigar stores, the

automats, the news-stands. The men were wearing their palm-beach suits and straw headgear; the "girls" between the ages of sixteen and sixty were wearing dresses of every colour, style, shape—and size. There was a holiday air even about those who were hurrying to work. Yes sir, maybe it's Paris in the spring, but New York in the summer certainly has plenty to show.

I got two suites at *The New Criterion*. I didn't keep an establishment in New York. There would not have been much point in it—on my own. I had intended to take Dianne out to lunch, but she liked the hotel so much she asked if we might have our first New York meal there. Of course I said "yes", but—it was a mistake. If we could have made it in an outside restaurant at once, the trouble might have been avoided for at least a time. I am referring to the descent of my New York friends upon me.

You can't have plenty of dough without having plenty of friends, and you can't have friends and privacy as well. Not in New York, at any rate. How they found out so quickly that I was back was probably something that concerned the hotel dicks, who often make money on the side by dropping hints over the phone to gossip writers and the like, and I hate to say it but I number at least three of the latter species among my friends. There was no help for it. It became a luncheon party, then a tea-party, and following that—cocktail, dinner, theatre and supper party.

Dianne was a riot, and she stood it well. She also stood the wine well, much better than anyone else there, I believe, with the possible exception of the polo star, Ronnie Graveman. I believe he did a lot for Dianne as regarded her choice of drinks. For that much I was grateful to him; for the rest of it my sentiments were not so generous.

It was natural that Dianne should be pleased at the attention showered upon her, and I wanted her to have fun. At the same time I figured upon being the guy who handed most of the fun to her. But that was before Ronnie Graveman came into our picture. I had known him since college days, and like myself he was a man who had no financial cares. He was a good chap in the ordinary way—tall, well-built, and good-looking, but—he just would not, or could not, lay off anyone else's preserves. He was one of those guys who seemed to have been born with the idea that every pretty woman he meets has been waiting all her life for him to show up.

There wasn't time in three months, of course, for us to stay all summer in New York, and few people would ever dream of doing

such a thing, but I'm certain that Ronnie was the reason why Dianne wanted to stay in New York longer than we had reckoned. I don't say she had fallen for the guy; I had plenty of good reasons for thinking the reverse, especially when I chanced to be alone with her, a state of affairs which Ronnie seemed able to circumvent most of the time. He took to turning up everywhere we went, calling on us or ringing us when I, at least, didn't want him. Finally I brought things to a head by booking reservations for Dianne and I on a strato-cruiser for Europe. When I told her she said:

"That's nice of you, Franklin Bruhn, but—could it not have been, say, in two weeks' time, dear?"

"It could not," I said. "And Dianne, on Earth you don't *have* to give me my full title all the time. 'Franklin' goes—amongst friends."

She gave me her lovely smile, and said:

"O.K., Franklin. But——"

"Dianne," I told her, "we have already spent nearly one third of our vacation in the heat of New York. I wanted to get the European trip over so I could show you Florida, the Adirondacks, Rio, Mexico City, and—California."

"All right, Franklin." She gave me another smile and a quick hug. Then: "But—in two weeks . . . "

I pointed a finger in her direction, and said:

"Don't tell me that in two weeks' time that big slug Ronnie Graveman is going to Europe."

I had a sinking feeling. She looked surprised, and I thought there was a change in her expression as she nodded, and said:

"Yes—and by strato-cruiser."

CHAPTER X

I DECIDED to have a word with Ronnie, but I found that he had gone to Pittsburgh, and that's the last place I would think of going for an informal chat. The night before the strato-cruiser was due to leave with Dianne and I aboard, I had a word

with Dianne instead. A letter had arrived that day for her. It had been in what I seemed to recognize as Ronnie's handwritng and it had borne the Pittsburgh postmark. We had our first few "words" at that interview, and I said cheerio to her, then went back to my suite to snap the fastenings on my grips. Thinking it over some time afterwards I had to allow that I hadn't given the kid a chance to say whether she had wanted to do the trip with me—or Ronnie Graveman, curse him. I had taken it for granted, probably from the defensive attitude she took up, that she preferred his company, which would probably have been better than mine at the time we were arguing. I stayed that night at another hotel, one nearer the airport.

I felt like a gilt-edged heel, walking out on the thing like that, but—that's how I felt, and that's how it had to be. I spent one hell of a night out there, pacing between the balcony outside my room and the table inside where I had planted a bottle of Scotch, a syphon, and a bowl of chipped ice. I lit innumerable cigarettes and threw them away, I cursed Ronnie Graveman to all eternity. I managed the ghost of a grin when the idea occurred to me of trying to send Ronnie back to Illion's dimension along with Dianne, instead of going myself. That would have been a fine lark, I don't think. Dianne was mine—at least . . . .

I knew then that Dianne *had* to be mine, in spite of all the Ronnie Gravemans in the world; and I wanted her right here on Earth, not in the goddam' dimension where you were only "minds" where intellect was supposed to be sufficient compensation for the total loss of physical beauty; where work, and ambition, courage, and love, had no reward whatever. And that was the "blessed" state to which Dianne and I were supposed to return after our brief sojourn on Earth—for the last time; and after Ronnie had taken the best of Dianne's company—if he could.

I decided to cancel the European trip in any case. Then I would go back to New York and ask Dianne's forgiveness. I squeezed out my final cigarette and got ready for an hour or two of sleep, grinning slightly at my come-down. But there it was; I felt just as low as that. I slid out of my clothes and fell into bed.

It was nearly eleven the next morning when I awoke. Still there was plenty of time—I thought. I showered and shaved, dressed for the day, and breakfasted in the hotel. Then I took a car out to the offices of the Pan-American Airfleet. I cancelled the trip, and was handed a wire that had awaited me since early morning. It

was from Dianne. It said:

"Franklin Bruhn—If you fly to Europe I swear to return at once to Illion—D."

I returned to the *New Criterion* around the middle of lunch time. To my dismay Dianne was out. I went up to my suite, had a drink there; wandered out on to the balcony. That balcony communicated, except for a low iron rail, with the balcony outside Dianne's suite. I found myself staring at her lounge window, which was open. I went over the rail and peered into Dianne's suite. Then I *went* into the suite. There was no sign of her, if you forgot about the lovely things she had left around. One thing she had left lying around, and which wasn't lovely to my way of thinking, was the letter from Ronnie Graveman. In the ordinary way I should not have dreamt of reading it; in this case, and because I got a sudden fear for Dianne—I did.

I was a different guy when I put that letter down. In it, Ronnie had told Dianne of his wonderful "lodge" on the coast north of Atlantic City. I knew that lodge; we used to have parties there—bachelor parties as a rule, but Ronnie seemed to have changed. One thing I did know—there were no servants there unless Ronnie ordered some specially. As a place to take a young lady it was better than running out of gas on the highway. Ronnie's letter proposed showing Dianne the lodge on a certain date, and that date belonged to to-day.

I went slowly back to my suite, but I hadn't reached it by the time my phone bell was ringing. I lugged the receiver up to my ear, half-expecting an invitation to some darn-fool party or another. I jumped when Dianne's voice hit my ear-drum. She was dithering with suppressed excitement, and there was a little panic in her tone as she asked if it were I. Then:

"I am at Ronnie's lodge in New Jersey. He—he—Franklin Bruhn, I am in trouble. Come quickly—I——"

That was all I got before I heard her gasp. Next came the shot, and the phone was useless. I banged the cradle several times without a sign, then I made for the elevator. My best car, a Bentley, was in the hotel garage with her tank full-up. I had the thing on the street almost before the mechanic-in-charge realized who I was. It was less than a hundred to Atlantic City, using the Brooklyn tunnel, and once on the main highway leading south through

New Jersey I slammed the gas-pedal to the floor-board and held it there. The landscape raced towards me and tore past my ears as the needle in the speedometer crept higher and higher. I didn't bother to change down on the last long hill that took me close to Ronnie's lodge. In the mood I was in that car would have climbed Mount Everest in top gear.

I swung left off the main highway at the top of the hill without noticing the fine view of Atlantic City beach, shimmering, as it must have been, in the afternoon sunshine. The third-class road now led me through the little forest surrounding the "lodge", and the shadow those trees gave was the same colour as the shadow that lay on my heart. If Dianne . . . if that shot I had heard . . .

I stopped the Bentley outside the lodge gates without a murmur from the brakes. In a flash I had opened the wooden gate and I stood on the path which ended in a slight curve before the lodge proper. Neither Ronnie nor Dianne was dead. Ronnie was standing in the middle of the lawn. As I went towards him I could see that something had happened to him. He wore a white silk open-neck shirt, light blue slacks, and sandals, but his face was grey-white, his eyes glowing like live coals. I stopped in my tracks and stared at him; then I heard Dianne's voice. It came from an upstairs window, and in it relief and terror were about equally mixed. I glanced up and saw her throw something towards me. It was a revolver, and it fell at my feet. She cried out:

"Be careful of him, Franklin Bruhn. I think he is mad. I tried to hold him with the gun until you came, but he got out by a trick. Watch him. I'm coming down."

I left the gun where it had fallen, and I walked across the bit of grass towards Ronnie Graveman. As I got closer I saw what had happened to him from the smallness of the pupils in his eyes. I didn't know much about drug-takers, but you couldn't miss the unearthly pallor, the eyes, and—other things. He started to curse me as we stood there eyeing each other for a matter of seconds, but he didn't get very far before something snapped inside of him. I knew it was coming, and I knew that Ronnie was physically strong, besides having a lot of text-book boxing skill. We were almost equal in size although I guess I was the heavier, and my fighting habits had been picked from professionals around the time when I fancied myself as a coming heavyweight. It was just as well, because Ronnie fought me with the cunning of a fox and the traditional strength of the madman.

Right there on the lawn we settled the matter of Dianne in time-honoured fashion, but Ronnie couldn't take it. I stopped his last rush with a left that slammed straight between his eyes, after which I sunk my right so far in his middle it seemed like I had to stop for a second and pull it out again. As he slumped forward I brought up the best thing I have, a left hook that even Joe Louis had pronounced as good. When it hit Ronnie it made a sound like a floor-board giving way. He was "out" for keeps before he reached the grass.

I drove west, with a frightened Dianne clinging to my right arm, as far as Philadelphia, where I bought a complete new outfits of clothes and other things for us both, figuring we had both seen enough of New York for the time being. And, anyway, it was time we got our American tour under way, with less than eight weeks of our last vacation on Earth to run.

I could easily see how the unaccustomed life of the metropolis had got Dianne all mixed-up, especially with the attentions Ronnie Graveman had lavished upon her. As we drove south through Virgina, North Carolina, and Georgia, she was the brand-new, sweet-natured Dianne I had seen in reality for the first time when she came to physical life that morning in my chalet at Lakewood, Ohio. Whenever I remembered that morning, and realized that Dianne's first glimpse of Earthly life dated from that time, a cold hand seemed to lay itself upon my heart, and it took all the sunshine in Florida to remove that coldness. Once, as she lay in my arms on the sand at Daytona Beach, I felt her start to tremble. We had been gazing up at the faultless blue sky, saying nothing but just soaking up the sunshine. I hauled myself into a sitting position and looked down at her. She didn't smile up at me, happily, as she would normally have done. I noticed that her bottom lip trembled slightly, and her lovely eyes were half-filled with tears. I asked what was the matter, and she said:

"Franklin Bruhn, I am—happy."

"*Happy*?" I cried. "Well, if that's the way——"

"But don't you see——"

She sat up suddenly, and clung to me afresh.

"Don't you realize we have to leave all this—and so soon, Franklin, I—I have come to love this Earthly life. Even though

it should last but a few of your Earthly years I should prefer it to an eternity of existence in the dimension of Illion. Franklin Bruhn —*I don't want to go back.*"

She pressed her face against my chest, and I patted her on the back like you would a child. I didn't wish to go back to being just a "mind", either, and for the first time since we had come to Earth, in spite of all the teaching I had taken in Illion's dimension, I felt myself rebelling against the idea. I thought it out as I held Dianna in my arms; tried to balance the Eternal life that existed beyond the barrier with the few weeks of Earthly life we had left. If we broke faith with Illion the First it meant death—death complete and irrevocable. On this sunny beach, breathing God's sweet air, basking in the sunshine He had given us, and seeing the power of His hand in the mighty ocean beyond tbe white surf before is, it seemed impossible that any being other than God could offer us such a choice. For a moment I began to doubt . .

Then I felt Dianne raise her face from my cbest. As though she bad read my thoughts, she said:

"It is true, Franklin Bruhn. Last night I bad the first message —from Illion."

Her words had all the effects associated with a douche of cold water.

"It was a warning, and it was when we were watching that news sequence on the television in the hotel after supper. The screen had gone in a flash and there was Illion. He spoke directly to you and I, but I think you did not get it. It was only a brief reminder of the date of our return. Then the news sequence was there again. The thing only took the fraction of a second in our time here. I heard someone remark on the sudden flicker of the screen, and they said something about 'interference', but that was the propaganda method you were told about. At the proper time it will be made visible and understandable by everyone, without them realizing, at first, that they are being taught, as Illion often puts it, to absorb his propaganda."

I drew a deep breath, then got to my feet, drawing Dianne witb me. That part of the beach was only thinly populated. I still held Dianne tight in my arms. and I tilted her dark head so that I might kiss her. It was in that instant I made the big decision.

CHAPTER XI

AS I gazed into Dianne's eyes I knew that there had to be something more than the eternal life promised by Illion the First. It had been decreed that man should fulfil his destiny on Earth before passing on to the hereafter. Dianne and I were in love—I knew it without even asking her—and without the fulfillment of that love there could be nothing either now or in any world to come. How Illion would have reconciled that with his own theories I didn't know, but I looked at the lovely girl who was so close to me, and I said, simply:

"Dianne—do you love me?"

A quick smile touched the corners of her mouth, and a light flickered in her eyes as she said:

"Why, of course, Franklin Bruhn. I thought you knew."

I smiled at her, and asked:

"Enough to become my wife, and live with me until the time when we should return to Illion?"

Her eyes were half-closed as she nodded and whispered the answer. I remained silent for a time, but suddenly her eyes were wide open again, and her body tensed as she cried:

"Franklin Bruhn—*I am not going back*!"

I smiled again, and nodded slowly. Then I kissed her, after which she pressed her face to mine, and whispered close to my ear:

"I will be happy with you for this little time on Earth, and after —I would rather we died than be lost to each other in the darkness beyond."

I said "Amen" to that, and together we made our way back to our hotel.

We were married in Miami and we spent several days there From that point I wanted to fly across the Gulf to Mexico, but I got a sudden fear that Illion might take it into his mind to pull us in while we were flying.

"But no," Dianne said. "That can only be done at the right moment when the two times coincide. And that time is not yet."

I said I supposed she was right, but I didn't like flying any more. Illion was so clever, I thought, that he might even have solved that difficulty, although he would not wish to collect a

whole crateful of air passengers at the same time. The other ways, of course, were the railroad and by boat from Tampa. Either way would have taken a whole heap of time, and that was the one thing of which we were so short. I made reservations on a plane leaving the next day. It would allow us to travel mostly during the night and reach Mex. the following morning. The night before we were due to fly the Gulf I took Dianne out to dinner, a dance club, and a midnight roof-garden film show; and it was on that night that three important things happened.

As we left the dance club we heard rumours about the "flying saucers". When we reached the roof-garden the "saucers" were *there*. They were high up at first, and there were a score of arguments going on between the people on the roof. There were also a score of theories being discussed, none of them the right one—that the machines were really there, and that they were neither optical illusions nor figments of the imagination.

Dianne clung tightly to my arm as we watched. The machines had a greenish phosphorescent hue, and even at a great distance it was possible to see that the upper and lower discs were revolving at a tremendous rate. No lights were visible from the portholes, which were not visible from the roof-garden, but which Dianne and I knew to be there. The machines dropped gracefully to within three thousand feet, swept silently over Miami, then went straight out over the Atlantic. That was the first of the things that happened that night. The second was similar to Dianne's message on the tele screen, only this time I got it as well, and it was shot into the middle of the film.

It was Illion the First all right, and he appeared on the screen without the slightest warning. His message this time was to both Dianne and myself, and he spoke for what seemed to be a full two minutes, dwelling on the fact that we could possibly find ourselves tempted to deny him when the time came for us to return to the dimension. He repeated his warning about the penalty for treachery, as he called it, then smiled at us, wished us "adieu", and was gone. The point at which he had appeared had been in the middle of a sentence spoken by one of the actors, and when Illion had vanished that actor went straight on and finished the sentence without any apparent break as far as the rest of the audience were aware. I heard a voice behind us ask: "What was that?" Another voice replied that it seemed like a blemish on the film, adding: "But I thought we were in for a breakdown." In other words, although Dianne and I had seemed to listen to Illion

speaking from the screen for around two minutes his appearance and speech had actually lasted only a fraction of a second.

At least Illion had done what he had told me he could do in the way of superimposing himself on to either tele shows or film shows, and I saw that the thing held alarming possibilities when he started to use the propaganda he had mentioned, using it so as to hypnotize the world's masses. Also, if Illion could do so much, what reason had I for thinking that he could not make good the other boasts—the contrivance capable of preventing the detonation of the H-bomb; the weapon which could rub out huge masses of the Earth's population without leaving a trace? By the time the film show was over I had arrived at a decision, one that I should have arrived at the moment I got back to Earth from the dimension, and—that was the third important thing that occurred that night.

When we reached our hotel I told Dianne that the trip to Mexico was off. She smiled, and said she didn't mind. Then I told her of my decision, and I felt the perspiration upon my brow as I realized how belated that decision was.

"I should have done something about all this when we first got here, honey," I told her. "It makes me almost a traitor to my own country—to the whole world. Even if you and I pass out of circulation when the three months are up we could at least have left something useful behind us. We might have tried to prepare the government of this country for what was in store—mass hypnotism on a scale hitherto undreamed of; world conquest in the twinkling of an eye if the world does not come to heel. Weapons such as our scientists hadn't started to think up."

Dianne had a thoughtful look, but I had the idea she agreed with me. I went to the cabinet and mixed drinks for us, then:

"Dianne," I said, "would it be possible for you to write down the secrets Illion holds? I mean—your memory must be phenomenal, and you are Illion's second-in-command. You have decided to throw in your lot with the Earth, therefore . . . . "

I watched her beloved face as the idea was reviewed swiftly within her mind. A shadow crossed her face. I knew that, in the ordinary way, it would have been asking a lot. But . . . .

She suddenly came to me, put her hands on my shoulders, then said:

"Franklin Bruhn, I am going to do what you suggest. I see that Illion's views and plans are wrong. I can see that, while he might end war, he would also end many other things—things that have been built up through thousands of years. In spite of our intelli-

gence we could not know the beauties of this life here on Earth until we had actually experienced them as I have done. I am willing to do all I can to counteract Illion's plans. It makes no difference to the fate which you and I have decided for ourselves, but, as you say, we might be able to do something for the rest of humanity."

I clasped her to me for a long moment, telling her I knew she would see the right way. Then I got busy. I phoned the airport and cancelled our reservations for Mexico, managing at the same time to make reservations for Washington.

"I have some connexions," I told her, and then went to work on the phone again, this time long distance. I was lucky with my connexions but breakfast time was about climbing through the ropes by the time I had finished. Dianne was fast asleep in the lounge.

I sweated it out all the way to Washington. In spite of Dianne's assurances I was dead scared that Illion might in some way jerk us back through the barrier, as he had done to me when I had been flying my plane over the Pacific. At first that experience had seemed like a first-class adventure in pleasant surroundings; now I recognized it as something that had put the sentence of death upon me as well as Dianne, and was threatening to do the same thing to the peoples of the Earth. I breathed freely only when our plane touched down in Wash.

Sandford James, attorney-at-law, was not only a friend, he was something of a relation of mine on my late mother's side, although I was never able to figure out exactly what the relation was, which didn't matter at all because James was a fine guy, well up in the legal as well as the social circles in Wash., and he was as glad to have a visit from me and my beautiful young wife as we were ourselves. I had contacted him by phone from Miami, of course, and he was at the airport to meet us. He was a shade more than medium height, grey and distinguished-looking, well-dressed and charming. He and Dianne took to each other at once. It was spot-on dinner time when we flew in but Sandford James insisted upon driving us to his house in Wash., instead of having us eat near the port. He had waited dinner for us, he said.

He was a widower, but his house, in the fashionable part, was something to remember in the way of luxury and refinement. With dinner out of the way, the lawyer lost no time in getting us down to brass tacks. When we were comfortably settled in the library he pushed a low, wheeled table into the circle. On the table

was a neat but expensive-looking tape-recorder. He set the thing going, adjusted it, then leaned back in his chair and asked us to forget it.

"From what you said on the phone," he told me, "I figured your story was going to be a long one, and I will therefore require a complete record of it. I did not wish to introduce an outsider in the shape of a stenographer. Now . . . "

I told him—the lot. Like he had figured, it was a long, long story, and it was past midnight when I reached the end. Sandford James looked tired when I got through, ending with the "saucers" over Miami and the way in which Illion had given us the warning both by way of the telescreen and the film. The lawyer stared at me for a long time while he slowly crushed out the remains of his cigar. Then he sighed, almost like a groan, and got to his feet. With one hand resting on my shoulders he said:

. "And that, Frank, is the story I have to tell to certain senators —to-morrow?"

"Why sure," I told him.

He sighed again. Then:

"I hate this, Frank., but—there isn't a darn' one of those guys is going to believe a single word of it."

CHAPTER XII

HE was right. He worked on it for nearly a week, then, when at last he had forced a personal appearance for Dianne and I less than half the government big-shots showed up. Those who did were sceptical. I answered all the questions that were put to me; Dianne did the same. But—we could prove nothing. One big-head worked up a habit of chuckling whenever I referred to the weapons Illion possessed. I almost took a swing at him across the table, but I thought of the danger *they* were in, and I held it. It was all a matter of that proof. They wanted proof, proof, PROOF; and we just couldn't give it to them. But—that very night, as it happened, *Illion the First gave it to them himself.*

We were all three called to a certain important building the next morning. By that time it was all over the world. "Flying saucers" had not only appeared over most of the important countries of the world during the night—they had actually dropped showers of leaflets, and in the languages of the different countries. Moreover, Illion had really gone to town on the propaganda business. I figured he had spiked his own guns to some extent, but

something must have happened to make him advance his plans and take the line he did. It could have been that he was now aware of the intentions of Dianne and I, of course. Then again he could have gone nuts, like all great "minds" are said to do under certain circumstances. Whatever the reason, he certainly put the skids under the world's brightest boys that night, and did *they* go to town in the press the next morning!

There were no chuckles in the chamber this time. It wasn't the same chamber, anyway. It was a much bigger one, and more imposing than the last. So were many of the names attached to the guys who were seated round the table when Dianne, Sandford James, and I arrived. The talk had been subdued when we entered; when we advanced to the table it ceased altogether. From the looks on most of the faces there I knew we were really going to get a hearing this time. I had the idea that the interrupted tele. and film shows throughout the world had scared them more than the appearance of the "saucers". Both Dianne and I had heard and seen it on Sandford James's instrument, and Illion hadn't made it a one-second affair that time. He spoke for a full five minutes, told the world who he was, what he wanted, how he was going to get it. He finished by throwing in a veiled warning to Dianne and I which clinched the whole thing as far as the big-shots in Washington were concerned.

The man whose name was known to every man, woman, and child in the world, and who was seated at the head of the table, hadn't got where he was for nothing. He wasted few words and no time whatever. He said he had read through a *precis* of what I had told the last conference, and had noted my suggestions as regarded the countering of such an attack as had been described to the world the previous night.

"I do not know, Mister Bruhn," he went on, "how much time we have, or how far we can get *in* that time, but we have to get working straight away. It's up to you and your wife to give us everything you know, especially Mrs. Bruhn. She can at least give us minute details of these astonishing inventions; the rest will be up to our technicians. A headquarters is already being fixed for you. There will be scientists, draughtsmen, planners, stenographers, and any other staff you require. I understand that you, Mister Bruhn, are a man of substantial means, and therefore the questions of expense and other financial concerns can be gone into much later. Anything you need will be there for your asking. In the meantime you have the thanks of the American nation, of the world, I should say, for coming forward."

And that was that. We did just as he said—we went to work. Within hours Dianne and I began to realize what it was like to be pumped dry and then to be pumped all over again. Dianne stuck it in a way that sent my opinion of her higher and higher with each passing hour, and those hours seemed to go by as though old Father Time himself had adopted skates.

It was difficult for us to know how much progress was being made as the weeks passed. The only reports we got at first came through a youngish scientist named Karl Hader. I liked him in spite of his huge spectacles and his thinning hair, and he must have been one of the cleverest guys on the staff. How he had managed to cram in the time for learning all he knew in his twenty-eight years I haven't an idea. It was he who drew up the anti-hypnosis course that was broadcast by every radio and tele station in the world daily, and it was he who got the first tangible results from the calculations worked on the details Dianne had given about Illion's method of preventing the detonation of all H-bombs. He even found time to interest himself in the problem of Dianne and myself. The time was running out fast, and it wasn't my idea of spending a honeymoon, although the hectic time we were having at the H.Q. had a lot to do with keeping our minds off the fateful date. It was when we had but a week to go that Hader gave me a book to read. He said he would see me when I had read it.

That book contained a lot of stuff that was clear above my head, but it had a lot that was similar to a work I once read on Black Magic, although it wasn't quite the same. I asked him about it the next day when he was taking a cup of coffee with Dianne and I in the canteen at H.Q. He took the cigarette I offered, and said:

"Mister Bruhn, I am not going to apologise for bringing up the old line about there being more things in heaven and earth, and so on. At the same time I guess the man who would call, say, an explorer a liar just because he hadn't himself seen the things described by the explorer, is a darn' fool. It's the same with the dimension you say you stepped into—the dimension of Illion the First. There's scarcely a man in the government here who honestly and truly believes in a dimension other than the ones with which we are all familiar. It took the dropping of leaflets from the air, and the interruption of radio, film, and television shows to scare them into doing what they are doing now. Even so I have the idea they think that stuff came from either Mars or the Moon."

He accepted a light for his cigarette. Then:

"I want you both to meet a certain person within the next few hours. He is very nice, and very important—to you. In fact, I believe him to be the one man on Earth who can help you both in the crisis that is coming to you."

He leaned forward, slightly, and asked:

"Mister Bruhn, have you any idea how long you have before you are due to—well, to step back through the barrier?"

I heard Dianne draw in her breath sharply. I said:

"Just six days—according to Dianne's reckoning."

He met my gazed steadily for a moment, then said:

"If you will forgive me for saying so, the lady has lost her touch, doubtless because of the stress of all that you are both doing right here. I noted the moment of your arrival on Earth, and, believe me, I know more than a little about the time differences. I have worked your timing out for you, have checked on it backwards and forwards in many different ways, and I find that the lady has miscalculated."

He reached into an ash-tray and crushed out his cigarette.

"Mister Bruhn," he said at last, "*you and your wife have exactly forty-eight hours before the time comes for you to leave this Earth.*"

I guess Dianne and I had been so busy we had clean forgotten the calendar. I looked at her, and thought she looked anything but well. It must have been overwork. She put her hand to her head and closed her eyes. It hit me like a stone to think that in so short a time . . ..

I turned on Karl Hader, sharply, then shook my head. After all he was right to tell us. I stood up and put a hand on Dianne's shoulder. She was shaking a little. Then she looked up at me, and I felt rather than saw Hader start to leave us. I turned to him and thanked him. He smiled, and said it was O.K.

It was very late that night when he rang us up at our hotel. Dianne and I had just arrived there after a hectic day at H.Q. Hader sounded excited, said the personage had arrived by plane, and asked if he might bring him to see us at once as time was against us in any case. I gave him the word, then hung up and told Dianne. She came alive at once, and asked for a cigarette. I gave us both cigarettes, then paced up and down the lounge. Hader was right. Forty-eight hours, he had said. Forty-eight hours to live—unless . . .

In almost no time at all the phone rang again. The desk clerk asked if he might send two gents up. I waited again, and for some reason it seemed to take Hader and his friend longer to come up in

the elevator than it had done for them to cross the city. I opened the door of the suite almost before the buzzer had stopped. Karl Hader was there, also his friend. I don't remember what I had expected that friend to be like, but a rabbit could have knocked me over when I saw him. He was dressed in a reasonably-cut American suit, and his skin was the golden brown you can only get when you happen to be a native of an island in the Pacific. He was an elderly man, and he possessed a quiet, engaging smile. He was the old gent I had interviewed in Hawaii after Illion's first attempt to pull me through the barrier.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was dark in the valley and it was cold, unless the excitement of the moment was making me feel that way. There were several high-ranking men in our party, but I had time only for Dianne, Karl Hader, and the old guy from Hawaii. The latter had given numerous orders to Hader—Hader had worked unceasingly to see that those orders had been carried out to the letter—those orders and certain others of his own.

Dianne and I had been kept in the dark about almost everything, having been told to rest for the few hours that were left. Now the time was at hand, and we were striving to remain calm and collected, as the old Hawaiian had insisted. We had arrived by road, secretly and silently. I was only vaguely aware of what was going on, and I couldn't see a thing. Car lights had been doused, and now the Hawaiian and Karl Hader were leading Dianne and I to a spot selected by them during the day. The time of coincidence had been fixed as the stroke of midnight, and it wanted exactly an hour. We reached the selected place at eleven fifteen. Almost at once the moon started to come from behind the last bank of cloud.

We were standing in a mile-wide valley with black forests rising on either side. The grass where we stood had been mown in a circle some twenty feet in diameter, and there were several guys dumping wooden cases on the grass. They wore the uniform of the American Army. We watched the Hawaiian superintending the opening of the cases, then Karl Hader touched me on the arm and motioned Dianne and I to one side of the circle.

"We have a few minutes while the old boy gets ready," he said, and offered us cigarettes and a light.

I realized that I needed that smoke badly, the worry of it all having put me off cigarettes for hours, it seemed. But now I didn't seem to worry at all, not with everything apparently under control. Presently Hader said:

"Mr. and Mrs. Bruhn, I cannot apologise for leaving you both so much in the dark about—" he waved in the general direction of the valley around us—"about everything. There wasn't time to explain. As it is, our friend from Hawaii has scarcely slept since he flew over, and he is not a young man. All the same I believe him to be the only man in the world who has a chance of saving you both. You must do exactly as he tells you, fearing nothing." He smiled. Then: "I might even say 'after all what have you both to lose?' "

I managed to shrug my shoulders, and I looked at Dianne. I thought she looked calmer than I had ever seen her, and far more beautiful if that were possible. And suddenly, for the first time in many years, I found myself breathing a silent prayer to a Power who, even then, I felt to be superior to the fabulous Illion the First.

"The data you were able to give us, Mrs. Bruhn," Hader was saying, "did a lot towards checking certain calculations of our own. It may surprise you to know that we were not entirely unaware of the possibility of preventing the detonation of both H-bombs and other weapons. We have been working on it for some years, as well as the ray which would enable us to decimate whole masses of people at once. Your knowledge has helped us more than you know, however, even in so short a time. But I have to admit that the interference on the radio, film, and television, is something which—ah——"

He had glanced over my shoulder, and he now held out his hand and said:

"It seems that our friend is now ready for you both. Please remember what I said—be of stout heart, and do not be surprised at the things you see here to-night. It might well be that, not only your fate, but the battle for the Earth will take place on this spot within the hour. My last words are—pay no attention to the things that happen around you. Try to concentrate on the instructions of our Hawaiian friend. There are many things in these hills to-night besides trees, and—we shall see what we shall see."

A final handshake and he had pushed us gently to the centre of the grass circle where the old gent awaited us. It was then eleven thirty, and the moon still shed only a thin light over the valley. We saw that three portable chairs had been placed on the grass

along with various small cloth bags and some stoppered bottles. Under the Hawaiian's guidance Dianne and I seated ourselves side on two of the chairs. The third chair faced faced us at a distance of about two feet. I saw that Dianne and I were facing east along the valley, and I was about to speak when the old gent motioned me to silence. Dianne saught for my hand and held it tightly in the semi-darkness. The soldiers who had brought the cases had already left us.

And now the Hawaiian went to work. He took up one of the bags, untying the string with which its neck was fastened, and withdrew a handful of what looked like flour. Allowing this to trickle through his fingers he described a circle around the plot that had been mown, leaving gaps at each point of the compass. From another bag he took something like ashes with which he filled in the gaps, making smaller circles over which he drew crosses. Into each of these sixteen sections he poured a substance like meal. His next task was to pour liquid from one of the bottles over each little pile of meal. He produced matches, struck one, and applied the flame to the liquid on the meal. It burned with a wavering blue flame, and the Hawaiian rose to his feet, made the sign of the Cross, then held out his arms and went into a short incantation which I knew to be in Latin. He repeated this at each point of the compass where he had made the design. He then walked slowly round the large circle, trickling another powder from another bag, and quietly intoning as though to himself. He set the bag down at last, crossed himself at each of the four small circles, then came to Dianne and I, asking us to rise to our feet. He said:

"Please repeat this sentence after me, the man first."

Again it was Latin, although I could not understand what it meant. Each time he recited it he held a small crucifix, first before my mouth, then my eyes, next my nostrils, then each of my ears. He repeated the ritual with Dianne, then asked us to be seated again, after which he took up a bottle and annointed our foreheads with what was evidently oil. He made signs before us, then replaced the bottle on the ground, glancing quickly along the valley in the direction of the east before seating himself opposite to us.

"Join hands with me," he whispered, "and with yourselves, so that we form the complete circle within the circle. Whatever the evil that comes to the Earth this night *will* come; what is to be will be; that which lies within our power we have done."

His timing had been perfect, for as he ceased speaking I saw

the valley—no, the Earth change. The pale light of the moon was slowly changing to a faint green which was gradually growing stronger, and now a gentle breeze could be felt. Presently it had strengthened sufficiently to be heard, and the strange thing was that it seemed to come from all parts of the valley. I heard the Hawaiian speaking again, and this time his voice had the echoing sound like that of a person who speaks in a vast cavern. It seemed to come from miles away yet was close at hand. It said:

"Take no heed of anything that may seem to come upon you. Do not break the circle within the circle no matter what the temptation. Shun all fear, for only courage will bring you through the ordeal before you."

A pin-point of light was now shining from the eastern sky. I saw it grow in size and intensity until it was almost half the size of the moon. Then, from its centre, came the other "moons." That is what they looked like at first as they came racing towards the valley, but so great was their speed that it was only a matter of minutes before they assumed the shape I knew so well—the shape of "flying saucers."

CHAPTER XIV

THERE were hundreds of the machines pouring towards us from that mystic green light when the first guns went off in the hills around us. Strangely enough they didn't give off the sharp detonations usually associated with guns; they gave a heavy "chuffing" noise, and as far as I could see there was neither flash from the guns nor tracer-track from the projectiles, whatever they were. There wasn't any doubt about the ruin they were causing amongst the "saucers", however, in spite of the fact that the incoming machines were spreading out as far as possible. The only explosions I heard came from the saucers themselves as hits were registered. When this happened there was a bright flash and the machines vanished in mid-air. And still they came on.

Some of the machines were bound to get through, and when they did they swept the length of the valley, releasing sticks of bombs which produced flashes of terrific power, but which only made sounds similar to the guns.

Through it all we three sat within the Hawaiian's circle and held hands. I found myself casting odds on our being hit by one of the bombs, but presently I saw three saucers that had defied the de-

fending barrage come swooping towards our circle. The displacement of the air as they passed close to our heads almost lifted us from the ground, and I closed my eyes because of the dust that followed. They didn't drop any bombs, but I knew that they had released something. A moment later, on the path over which the three machines had passed, I saw almost a score of the little "cabbage" men I had seen in Illion's dimension. They ran towards our circle, and as they came the sound of the wind rose to a whine, then to a roar. Finally, as they drew near, with the wind then screeching through the valley, I saw that a figure, completely hooded in black, was leading the saucer-men towards us.

They stopped short at the edge of the circle, and the little men ran round and round it, whatever spells the Hawaiian had cast with his diagrams apparently preventing them from crossing the lines that showed plainly in the ghostly green light. All the time that tall hooded figure stood facing us at the eastern side of the circle. I felt the Hawaiian's hand increase its grip on my own; Dianne's hand was as cold as ice. Still the flying saucers poured in a stream from the brilliant green star, still the guns in the hills kept up their "chuffing" din, firing so rapidly now that the incoming machines were liquidated almost as fast as they came.

Suddenly the black figure moved, and I saw the cloak whirling around and above him. Then the thing flew towards us, and the figure itself had vanished. The cloak completely covered our circle and descended upon us. It fell to the ground *and we passed through it* as though it had been merely a black shadow. And now there was nothing beyond the edges of the circle. The whole of the valley had gone, and I could no longer hear the sound of the battle. All I heard at that moment was the screaming wind, and it brought to my ears the sound of a triumphant laugh—a laugh that sent an icy chill down my spine. I could still see the Hawaiian sitting in the chair opposite me; could still feel the pressure of his hand. My other hand . . .

I gasped with horror as I realized that I was holding on to *both* his hands, and I looked at the seat beside me. *Dianne had vanished*!

I tried to leap to my feet but I couldn't move. I tried to break the Hawaiian's grip on my hands but found it impossible. Strong though I was, his fingers were holding mine as though his hand had been a steel vice. The wind was rising even higher, and again it brought the sound of that chilling laugh. This time it was followed by a cry—a woman's cry of terror. *Dianne*!

With a superhuman effort I wrenched my hands free, and I threw myself at the wall of emptiness that surrounded us. When

I hit that invisible barrier it was like slamming into solid stone, and I got a shock that jarred every bone in my body from my teeth to my heels. But I got through, and once again I could see the valley in its ghastly light. And now the guns were silent; the green star was growing paler; and there was but one flying saucer in the darkening sky. No gun was trained upon that single machine, and I got the idea that it was invisible to all but me. It was around four hundred feet up and descending slowly to a spot some fifty yards ahead. And between me and that spot I saw Dianne struggling with a man whom I knew to be Illion the First.

Fear lent me speed as I ran along that valley. Even as I started to run I saw Dianne collapse, only to be picked up instantly and thrown over Illion's shoulder. He was strong enough but Dianne's weight reduced his speed. I was almost on him when he sensed my closeness and dropped Dianne to the ground. I heard the whirring sound from the "saucer" as it came to within two hundred feet, and I saw Illion's teeth flash me a maniacle smile as he plucked a long dagger from his belt. Dianne had fallen on her back, her head bent back and her white throat a perfect mark for the wicked-looking blade. I saw the flash of jewels on the knife's hilt as Illion raised it triumphantly and took a quick aim.

What hidden force sent me hurtling through the air with such speed at that moment I cannot tell, but I managed to kick the dagger from Illion's hand as it started on its downward flight. I saw its jewelled hilt flash in the waning light as it whirled through the air over the would-be killer's head. In an instant we were at each other's throats. He was strong, but—so was I. He tried to use a knee on me, but I knew that trick, and I smacked in a powerful right hook. He went down and I would have gone after him, but—four little "cabbage" men fell from the machine above me and hung to both my arms.

I strained against them with all my strength but they seemad each to possess the strength of ten ordinary men, and Illion was on his feet again. As he ran at me I raised my foot and slammed him in the middle. He staggered back for a long way, then fell flat on to his back. At the same time I brought my heel back against the shin of one of the little men who were holding me, and I managed to free my right hand. I bunched that hand into a fist and smashed it into the face of the guy nearest. His face and head instantly vanished in a cloud of dust. I did the same to the others and then I was free.

Illion still lay on his back, his face green in the uneartbly light. I went forward and leaned over him. I thougbt his face had some-

how changed, but I was certain that he was dead. At that moment grappling hooks on a thin cable slid down from above. I looked up then backed quickly away. The saucer was whirring not twenty feet above me. I glanced again at the man on the ground, and in that second the hooks had got him. His body rose towards the open door on the hovering machine. As it went up it swung round twice and I saw two things. The man had fallen on the dagger, which must have lodged on the ground with its point uppermost. I could see the flashing hilt sticking out from between his shoulder blades. Then—I saw the dead face . . . .

I turned to where Dianne lay and I leapt towards her with a cry of horror. Another grappling hook was about to settle upon her. I got to her in the nick of time, shoved the swinging hooks aside, and plucked Dianne from the ground. I looked once over my shoulder as I ran with her back to the grass circle where I could now see lights and the figures of soldiers. The saucer was flying back towards the failing green star. Even as I looked the machine seemed to grow dim and vanish, just as the green light flickered and then went out.

There seemed to be hundreds of men near the circle. I saw the triumphant Karl Hader there, and willing hands helped me put Dianne on to a chair. I saw her shudder, then open her lovely eyes and smile, and I could tell from the sudden warmth in her hands that she was real, that we had indeed escaped the death that had been promised us.

"It's all right now, Mister Bruhn," I heard Karl Hader say. "We've beaten them, in fact I may say that we have annihilated them. Which means that you and your wife can live your lives on Earth in peace and happiness."

Dianne was in my arms, but we both did as Karl Hader asked when he said:

"Look."

He was standing in the circle near the chair occupied by the old Hawaiian. The still figure on the chair had been covered by a dark cloth. Karl Hader raised the cloth for a moment and we saw that the sightless face beneath it was dead.

It was the face of Illion the First!

THE END

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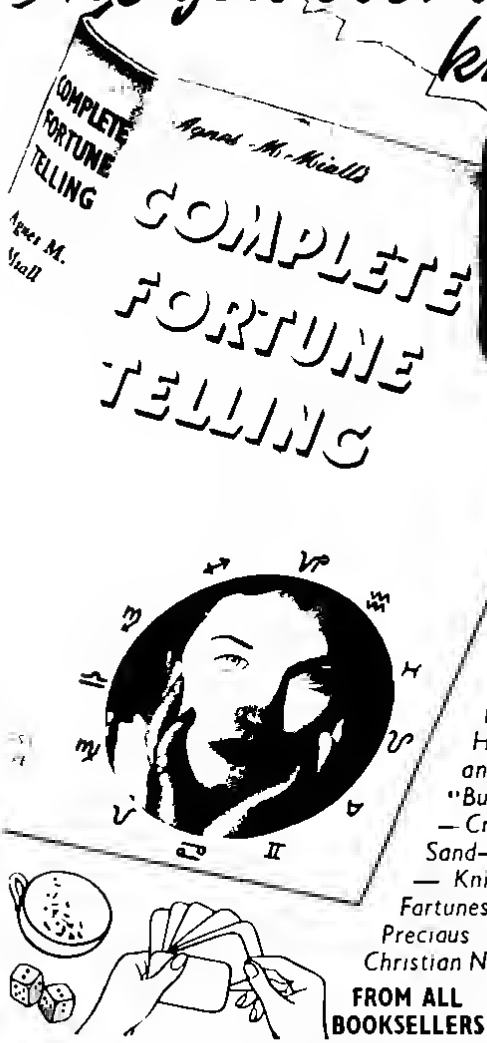

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